

# Christian Orient

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## ECUMENISM

### EDITORIAL

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- Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Panicker

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE INDIAN CHURCH BEFORE

Rev. Dr. Thomas Pallipurathukunnel

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- Rev. Dr. E. O. Babalola

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# CHRISTIAN ORIENT

An Indian Journal of Eastern Churches for Creative  
Theological Thinking

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## ECUMENISM

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## Editorial

At present the christian Churches are entering into a new ecumenical era. The historical event of Vat II and the numerous publications of the World Council of Churches have inculcated a sober and serious ecumenical as well as ecclesiological re-thinking. Vat II and WCC have succeeded in creating an increasing awareness of the sense of history among theologians and ecumenists. This sense of history and the principle of going back to the sources (resourcement) have resulted in serious studies on the pre-Nicene and post-Nicene ecclesiology. These studies have created a radical shift of emphasis in the theology of the Church. It finds expression in the reception of certain conspicuous and highly valuable ecclesiological thinking - trinitarian ecclesiology, communion ecclesiology, pneumatological ecclesiology, and eucharistic ecclesiology. As a result the attitude of triumphalism and self-sufficiency among the churches has given way to humility, self-criticism, mutual acceptance, respect for the others etc. Much of the confessional barriers between the churches are collapsing. This process will enable the churches to return to the proper 'homeland' (i.e. to the genuine apostolic tradition and patrimony of the church) in theological matters. This the only way to re-establish the proper identity of the different eastern apostolic churches. We need yet to know a great deal about what these churches are in themselves - their origin, history, theology, ecclesiology, spirituality monastic life, canon-law religious art etc. "The result will be that, little by little as the obstacles to perfect communion are overcome, all christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the eucharist, into that unity of the one and only church which Christ bestowed on His church from the beginning" (UR 4). It is with this specific goal in view that the Christian Orient always dedicates a special issue on Ecumenism.

The relationship between faith and culture has been a subject of keen interest since the middle of the present century. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World devoted an entire chapter to the relationship between faith and culture. Although, the tension between, christianity and culture can never be entirely overcome, faith as a system of ideas and values, cannot be deep and secure unless it takes root in the culture by which people's attitudes and behaviour are determined. The relation between faith and culture has also been taken seriously into consideration in this issue of the Christian Orient.

The first article by Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Panickar is a masterful exposition and a serious theological reflection on being a uniate. He surveys the historical origin and the theological status of the Malankara catholic church as a uniate church. He comes to the theological position that in the



present day set up of ecclesial communion the uniate churches have a role to play. They are churches with their own liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline. Therefore their existence is constitutive to the qualitative dimension of the catholicity of the one church of God. He also points out the fact that the uniate churches are "bridge" churches helping the separated christians to discover the true unity they seek. He is emphatic on the position that the uniate church should be seen as a communion movement.

In the second article, *Life and Ministry of the Indian Church Before Diamper*, Dr. Thomas Pallippurathukunnel gives a beautiful narration of the life and ministry of the Indian church of the Thomas Christians. He brings out an enormous amount of historical facts taking into consideration various topics like, origin of this church, its hierarchy, role of the Archdeacon, clerical formation and celibacy, faith and communion, and ascetical life. The style and method of this article will take the reader back to those common factors which our forefathers have shared together. In the context of the divided status of the Thomas Christians of India, this study has a special ecumenical relevance.

Fr. Sebastian Thundathil, in his *Cultural Dimensions of the Syro-malabar Church*, gives a very good theological reflection on the relation between faith and culture. He highlights the fact that the ancient church of Malabar received the Christ experience as an apostolic gift. The Malabar christians expressed this faith in the east syrian liturgy. This faith expression became the transforming element that resulted in the formation of an apostolic church which is a religio-socio-cultural synthesis. He comes to the conclusion that the Malabar church remains in the history of the universal church as a unique model of the fusion of the local culture and Christ experience.

The last article is by Dr. E. O. Babalola, on *Indigenising Christ in the Yoruba Community*. Taking into consideration the religious pluralism, the author makes a serious reflection on the urgent necessity of inculturating Christianity in Nigeria. He points out the necessity of an interaction between indigenous religions of the people and Christianity. According to him inculturation of christianity is the only way to uncover it from the western garments.

Editor



# Reflections on being a 'uniate'

## A Uniate Church

The writer is a priest member of the Malankara Catholic Church to which can be applied the epithet 'Uniate'. In the middle of the 17th century due to the policy of the Portuguese missionaries to latinize the liturgy and the indigenous customs of the Thomas Christians of India, a section of that community broke away from the Portuguese ecclesiastical authorities and eventually entered into communion with the Jacobite (Syrian Orthodox) Patriarch of Antioch and accepted West Syrian liturgical tradition. Since then many attempts were made to heal the division. All failed mainly due to the unsympathetic attitude of the Roman Catholic ecclesiastics.

In 1926, a Jacobite episcopal synod at Parumala, a village South West of Tiruvalla empowered Archbishop Mar Ivanios (the then Bethany Metropolitan) to enter into negotiations with Rome to effect a union with the Catholic Church under the explicit condition that the ancient and venerable tradition of the Malankara Jacobite Church (The West Syrian tradition) should be kept intact. Pope Pius XI accepted the condition and welcomed the union. Accordingly in 1930 Archbishop Mar Ivanios and a small group consisting of another bishop, a priest, a deacon and religious sisters were received into the Catholic Church; Immediately following this more and more priests, religious and laity joined this group.

In 1932 by the Apostolic constitution "Christo Pastorum Principi" the Holy See established the Syro-Malankara hierarchy and recognised the united group as an individual church, the Malankara Catholic Church. Its governance was similar to that of the Latin hierarchy. It is to this "Uniate" Church the writer of this article belongs. The Malankara Community who got separated from the Catholic Church remains divided as the Malankara Orthodox Syrian, the Syrian, the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Marthomite, and partly C.S.I. Churches. Besides many members of this community have joined the various Protestant denominations and sects and have become leaders of these denominations and sects.

## The emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church

The emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church has great importance for the Catholic Church in general and for the Indian Church in particular. Its meaning and significance have yet to be unfolded. Sometimes this event is understood and described as a return of some erring sheep to their paternal home. On the other hand the non-catholic denominations of the Malankara Church look down upon it as a betrayal and desertion of their mother church perpetrated in favour of (the sheep stealing policy of) the Roman Church. But the emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church is neither a mere seeking of refuge in



the paternal household nor a desertion of the maternal fold. It is an ecclesial event full of historical importance and spiritual significance. By the emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church the Malankara Church regained its status of an apostolic individual church in the universal church. In the process of regaining communion with the Holy See of Rome the Malankara Catholic Church has preserved its own liturgical heritage and patrimony maintaining in some way, though not completely, its individuality and autonomy.

The emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church is a loud and anticipated proclamation of the communion ecclesiology (propounded by the II Vatican Council), viz that every individual church has its own right of being individual and autonomous as long as it remains in communion with the Universal (Catholic) Church. With the emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church, the catholic church and the non-catholic oriental churches are brought closer together setting an ecclesial ground for real sharing and dialogue. Through the members of the Malankara Catholic Church, who are closely related and acquainted with their non-catholic brethren, the latter have an opportunity to learn more about the Catholic Church helping them to remove prejudices and misunderstanding. Similarly through the Malankara catholic church the other churches in the catholic communion get to know the life and spiritual heritage of the Malankara Church. Malankara Catholic church while witnessing to the individuality and autonomy of the particular churches proclaim the truth of the catholicity of the church. It remains a persuasive testimonial to the Non-Catholic Churches that communion

with the catholic church does not destroy their autonomy as individual churches.

During the past sixty three years of its communion with the universal church, the Malankara Catholic Church could grow up considerably and establish its position as an individual church regaining its vitality and spiritual strength. Growing as a vigorous Christian Community the Malankara Catholic Church at present consists of three dioceses about 300,000 faithful over 800 churches and Mission centres, nearly four hundred priests and 800 religious. As part of an ancient christian community of India, it is deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions and cultural values of India. Hence the Malankara catholic church, while keeping its christian antiquity, enjoys the creative force of a renewed church in the emerging culture of India.

The Malankara Catholic Church is blessed with the West Syrian liturgical tradition one of the most ancient and beautiful liturgical tradition of christendom. It was with the emergence of the Malankara catholic church in 1930 that this beautiful liturgical treasure became an asset to the catholic church in India. The liturgy has always been the centre of worship and spirituality in the Malankara Church. Nevertheless the statement of Adrian Fortesque which he made in 1913, is still applicable to its people in the present context of India.

"This liturgy is one of the most beautiful in Christendom. Strange that an insignificant little sect should possess so splendid a liturgical tradition."<sup>1</sup>

1. Adrian Fortesque, *The lesser Eastern Churches*, London 1913, p. 350



### **The Vocation of the Malankara Catholic Church**

As Christians in India, and as a church the Malankara Catholic church has to bear witness to Christ in the heart of India. By keeping the Malankara Church out of the missionary endeavour in larger India the Latin Church itself is failing to be a witness to Christ by not having the Christian charity and communion expected of the Church, which is supposed to "preside in love".

As an Eastern Catholic Church which has its origin among the Orthodox Christians of India, an essential Mission of the Malankara church is to create a favourable atmosphere for a communion of the Orthodox in India with the Catholic church.

As Eastern Catholics within a catholic church that is mainly Latin the Malankara catholic church should be a guarantee of true catholicity; viz, that a true catholic need not be a Latin catholic or "latinised" catholic, that in order to be a true catholic one has not to adopt a complete uniformity of Jurisdiction, discipline and liturgy through the out right adoption of the Roman rite or of "One rite". Malankara Catholic church should not be considered as an uncomfortable and inconvenient, out-growth tolerated as an instrument or a sort of bait for the conversion of the dissidents. The Malankara Catholic church as an Eastern Church should not be thought of as a mere "Rite" in the sense of having only different liturgical customs, but should be thought of as an individual church with its own liturgy, discipline, spirituality, theology and cultural heritage.

### **What it presents for christian unity in communion**

Superficial minds and armchair critics are capable of saying that the

Eastern Catholics whom they call "Uniat" are the least fit for promoting any kind of understanding with the Orthodox. Such a reaction from the Orthodox circles is normal and understandable because they refuse to consider any union, they think that any step in that direction is the beginning of disintegration.

### **The Ambiguity of uniatism and the Problem of Malankara Catholic Church as "Uniate" Church**

Malankara Catholic Church is a "Uniat" Church in the sense that it was established as a church in Communion with Rome as a result of a representative group of the Orthodox Church entering into communion with the Catholic Church. Many Ecumenists (Catholics as well as Orthodox) say that uniatism is not the authentic model for ecclesial communion. The Orthodox are inclined to consider the Malankara Catholic Church as a wolf in sheep's clothing intend upon sheep stealing. Some catholic ecumenists would say that the "Uniat" are the least fit for promoting any kind of understanding with the Orthodox, and for promoting the communion of the Churches. Those who criticize Rome for recognising the uniat Churches do not take sufficient account of the historical, and pastoral situation at the time of the union. The very fact that these union of individual groups or even of individuals take place will always be a matter of scandal for the Orthodox. There is, it seems nothing, to be done about this. What are Eastern Christians to do when they come one day to recognize that the breach with Rome is against the will of the Lord? Are they to remain out of the Catholic Church in order to please their own communities? They cannot do this in conscience. Are they to become Latins? In fact a good number of families and a few priests from the Orthodox Church have become Latins and some



joined the Syro-Malabar Church before 1930. This would imply that one cannot be catholic without being Latin or without becoming Latinized, and this would amount, in fact to a denial of Catholicity. Only one solution remains open, viz: to unite once more with Rome, while remaining Eastern. We wish our Orthodox brothers would understand that for uniate union with Rome is a matter of conscience and neither a defection nor an expedient.

The anomaly of the united Church versus "sister Churches" or the so-called ambiguity of uniatism should not be exaggerated in such a way as to prevent or exclude the reception of individual noncatholic Christians into the Catholic Church or to consider the united churches as a barrier between the Catholic Church and other Churches. The concepts of *Sister, branch, mother, daughter, magistra* etc should not be pressed beyond the limits of expressing certain aspects of and relationships implied in the complex, and almost ineffable concept of *Communion* (Koinonia). The Catholic Eastern Churches are not substitutes for the separated Eastern Churches; they are some sort of bridge churches to help the separated churches to discover the unity they seek, and these churches should merge or they should be merged into the corresponding Eastern churches in case these Eastern churches become part of the one Church of Christ.

To say that as churches, vis-a-vis Orthodoxy, there are no bridge churches, there are only sister churches, is to push the concept of "sister" much beyond its analogical meaning and its various connotations and to forget that when sisters do quarrel some bridge-building is required to reconcile them. Besides such ideas do not take into account that institutional communion, though absolutely necessary

is only a means for the full and perfect communion of the individuals to the institution and ultimately to God, to the fullness of Him who fills everything.

If *ounia* (union of a group from an Eastern non-catholic Church as against "Enosis" which means union of all) constitutes an obstacle to communion, as some ecumenists think today, what are these people to do? The answer seems to me that union should prepare the way for the big communion it should become a journey or a movement towards full and perfect communion. The very existence of the "Uniate" Eastern Catholic Churches has always been considered by the orthodox as one of the major obstacles to any theological confrontation with the Roman Catholic Church:

Uniatism should not perpetuate the reduction of the differences between the east and the west to the sole area of rites, discipline and "way of life". One should expressly assert that the liturgical and canonical tradition of the East cannot be isolated from doctrinal principles which it implies and which constitute the real issue between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

"Rome must not require more from the East with respect to the doctrine of primacy than had been formulated and was lived in the first millennium. When the Patriarch Athenagoras on July 25, 1967, on the occasion of the Pope's visit to Phanar, designated him as the successor of St. Peter, as the most esteemed among us as one who presides in charity; he was expressing the essential content of the doctrine of primacy as it was known in the first millennium. Rome need not ask for more" (Ratzinger). But sad to say even now after the II Vatican Council the Holy See officially often formulates and regulates eastern



tradition in terms of western and Juridical ecclesiology hardly adequate to its spirit and orientations.

The unity of the church is a mystery and the union of churches can be achieved only by a special grace of God. Humanly speaking, in the context of existing conflicts and complexities within each of the separated churches, in the context of these churches attempt to become autocephalous, and in the complex social and legal situation prevailing in these churches, it is practically impossible to achieve the union of these churches into one church. Even if the majority in these churches agree for such a union, there will be a few who claim to be the legitimate heirs of the churches in question, and these would continue to exist at least legally though perhaps reduced to a minority. It would be foolish therefore not to recognize, accept, encourage or foster the ecclesial tradition and liturgy of the group that wants to unite with the catholic church. What should rightly be rejected is the cheap proselytizing propaganda among the believers of another community. We should never forget that the grace of God is at work not only in the ecumenical movement, but also where the 'conversion' of the individual noncatholic christians or of group of noncatholic christians to the catholic unity takes place for reasons of conscience or even of mental peace and social convenience. Certainly such conversions from one church to another raise their own problems and form a burden in the relationship between the churches. But this has to be borne as part of the suffering caused by the divisions in the church founded by Jesus Christ, and should prompt the other members of the churches to seek and find the unity of the church. There is no other

way of solving the so called "theological problem" of the United Churches versus the sister churches. Whether the establishment of the united churches (or uniate churches) was good or bad for the cause of ecumenical union can remain only a theoretical question for academic theologians and arm chair critics. These churches do exist and some of them are even fairly successful. If they have not yet fulfilled all the expectations centred upon them, is it not because the powers that be in the church did not always help them to remain faithful to their vocation? Both deliberately and even indeliberately a process of Latinization is set in motion by the centralised power and administration of the Roman Church. One can say that there is a creeping Latinization. As the late Patriarch Maximos IV Sayagh has said: "The Eastern Catholic Churches represent a powerful and indispensable means for the establishment of christian unity, but only if they maintain, and are *helped to maintain* a two fold and equal loyalty toward catholicism and the East. If they are wanting in either regard they can only harm the cause of unification"<sup>2</sup>

### The Communion of Churches and the Principle of Autocephaly

The objection of the separated Eastern Churches against Uniate Churches cannot be justified in this present context of the formation of more and more autocephalous churches and of their followers in good number joining the various newly formed Christian sects. Just as the principle of uniformity or unitarism eliminates diversity and pluralism necessary for Communion the principle of autocephaly eliminates the necessity of a

2. Maximos IV Sayagh, *The Eastern Churches and Catholic Unity*; Nelson Edinburgh, 1963, p. 47.



visible centre of communion and leads to fissiparous multiplication and fragmentation of Churches.

"What should have been done 1900 years ago is now being clearly affirmed and established. The Orthodox Church of India is not a fully autocephalous Church...."<sup>3</sup>

One group of the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar, who are unfortunately divided into different Churches, known till recently as Bishop's party or Catholicose party of the Jacobite Church, is now calling itself the Orthodox Church of India, as a result of metamorphosis undergone in the course of group rivalry leading to squabbles and legal battles. According to a Bishop Spokesman of the Church this should have been done 1900 years ago. His words quoted above only express this new metamorphosis of this oriental group applying to itself the principle of autocephaly prevailing in the Eastern Orthodox Churches where this principle has evolved as a result of religious nationalism and the idea of power in the Church similar to that of the State.

The principle of autocephaly among the Eastern Orthodox (Greek & Russian) is of relatively recent origin. But the Orthodox, as opposed to the Protestants, used to believe in the visible unity of the church, viz. that the church is visibly one. If the church is a universal organism and as the Body of Christ has an organic unity she must have at her head a bishop as the focus and centre of her unity. The defenders of the principle of autocephaly assert that the church never had such a centre, and that the Risen Christ, invisibly present, is

the centre of the church. But as the eminent Orthodox Theologian Alexander Schnemann points out this opposition of the visible structure to the invisible Christ leads inescapably to "the protestant divorce between a visible and human church which is contingent, relative and changing and an invisible church in heaven". He rightly asserts that "the idea, popular in orthodox apologetic, that the church can have no visible head because Christ is her invisible head, is theological nonsense."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to say that if applied consistently, this idea should eliminate the necessity for the visible head of each local church, i.e. the bishop. In fact consistently it should eliminate a visible head for a so-called autocephalous church. In such an eventuality the profession of faith in the One-Holy-Catholic and Apostolic Church is confusing if not irrelevant. Consequently there is no ecclesiological principle to say that each local church or diocese in an autocephaly should not in its turn declare itself to be autocephalous. To hold a principle which will lead to such a fissiparous multiplication and fragmentation of churches and to say that all such churches are focused on an invisible centre are merely to assert an unintelligible and meaningless unity of the universal church. In this conception it is difficult to see the ontological identity of all churches with the church of Jesus Christ that establishes the connecting link between churches, making them the church universal. All the individual churches together are the same one and indivisible church of God, the Body of Christ. The church of God is manifested in the pluralism of the individual churches. They are ontologically the same church; this ontological

3. These are the words from the editorial of the journal from the Orthodox Seminary, Kottayam *The Star of the East*, July-September 1982, P. 3.
4. cf. J. Meyendorff et alii, *The Primacy of St. Peter*, London 1973, p. 36.



identity is expressed in a visible, living centre of communion, which guarantees the unity of faith, the unity of mission and the common task of the church. A local church cannot isolate itself, become its own head, a centre in herself, live 'by herself' and by her own local and private interest. Such a church cannot realise the fullness of Christ who fills all things in all. The church can realize this fullness only in a universal *Koinonia*—fellowship or communion. In fact this *koinonia* is the very essence of the church. And it should have a visible form and expression of primacy as the centre of the unity in faith and life of all local or individual churches. Only such a centre of communion can visibly guarantee the unity of faith and life of all churches, of the living and efficient *koinonia*. The Primate can speak for all because the church is one and because the power he exercises is the power of each bishop and of all bishops collegially united. And he must speak for all because this very unity and agreement require a special organ or expression, a voice. Primacy is thus a necessity because therein is the expression and manifestation of unity of the communion of churches as being the unity of the universal church. Orthodox Theologian John Meyendorff says:

"Speaking concretely, the orthodox clearly have no right to object to Roman primacy solely on the basis of the ethnic Provincialism of then national autocephalous churches as they exist today. These are undoubtedly covers for separation."<sup>5</sup>

Primate is always the bishop of a local or individual church and primacy belongs to him precisely because of his status in his own church. The

primacy is not a power over the churches by some one who is outside the church, it is a power within the church. The idea of jurisdictional power is the result of an 'order, or 'priority' of churches which does not subordinate one church to another, but which makes it possible for all churches to live together this life of all in each and of each in all thus by fulfilling the mystery of the Body of Christ, the fulness 'filling all in all'. The unity and communion of the church do not consist merely in sharing the same faith, the same Eucharist, the same structure, nor yet in the mere absence of hostilities between churches. In addition a centre of unity is necessary. Otherwise, in fact if not by right, the churches are divided in their life. Unity of the churches is there in existence, but not the unity of the church. Unity in the church, indeed, is not a property special to each church. It can only be unity that is communicated. Unity without effective communion, which cannot be realized without a centre of unity that is above each individual church, becomes a separated unity<sup>6</sup> The principle of autocephaly as the ecclesiological foundation of the church and her life excludes any centre or primacy, the visible expression of the communion of churches, and by that very fact goes against the ontological unity of the church of Christ. As the Orthodox Theologian Alexander Schmemmann points out the "autocephaly" with this particular meaning, "obscures the sacramental structure of the church rooted in its life as a Body of Christ, by a 'natural' structure thus making the church a "natural organism"<sup>7</sup> Schmemmann deplors all the harm done to the Orthodox church by this principle of autocephaly i.e. the "deep

5. The *Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, p. 231.

6. cf. Bernard Lambert, *Ecumenism* pp. 426-441.

7. Cf. Meyendorff et alii, *The Primacy of St Peter*, p. 55.



and tragic division of Orthodox into national churches each indifferent to the other living in and by themselves, the crises of the universal consciousness, and the weakening of the Catholic links..."<sup>8</sup>. He goes on to say that primacy cannot be separated from a deep and consistent return to a really Orthodox ecclesiology.

The group of St. Thomas Christians who call themselves now the Orthodox Church of India has not only rejected the ecclesiology based on the primacy of St. Peter so well and repeatedly mentioned in their liturgical books and tradition, but also has rejected the "Orthodox" ecclesiology of primacy. They have now submitted themselves to what Schmemann would call to "the universal ecclesiology which is a permanent temptation because in the last analysis it is a natural one, being the product of 'naturalization' of Christianity, its adaptation to the life 'after the rudiments of the World and not after Christ'. This is the beginning of an "ecclesiological disease" "obscuring the reality of the Church as people of God, as the church of God and the Body of Christ manifested and edified in every place"<sup>9</sup>. According to John Meyendorff "Nothing is more foreign to the early church structure than some modern understanding of autocephaly, according to which in the sphere of international relations, every autocephalous church is a full and equal subject of international law. Meyendorff affirms that "clearly, modern nationalism has effected a transformation of legitimate ecclesiastical regionalism into a cover for ethnic separation". "... church cannot adopt, as criteria of its structure and organization, the divisive

realities of the fallen world (including nationalism) as a eucharistic community?; it is called to transcend these divisions and reunite the separated. In its structure itself it must bear witness to Christ's Victory over the World.

After the separation of the Eastern Churches the identification of primacy with Supreme power which transforms Rome into the *Principium et origo* of the unity of the Church failed to consider that Pope is not the bishop of any other place other than Rome, (he is not the universal or super bishop) and that he is not the Patriarch of any region other than the West, and that he is the centre and Symbol of communion of the churches as the bishop of Rome and not a super bishop also. This ecclesiological distortion on the part of Rome has led many of the Eastern churches to the rejection of Universal primacy. Rejection of primacy too is a distortion. Both distortions are the products of 'naturalization of christianity, its adoption to the life "after the rudiments of the World and not after Christ". Any action, policy or procedure from the part of the Roman Catholic Church or of the separate Eastern Churches based on these distortions, whether it be deliberate or indeliberate will adversely affect the dynamism of the movement towards unity in Communion for which the "uniate" churches stand or should stand.

### Conclusion

A uniate church should be seen as a communion movement; it should not be called a *Re-union movement*, if such a term is meant precluding any idea that the Catholic church as it exists now has nothing to gain from

8. Cf. Ibid. pp. 55-56.

9. Meyendorff et alii, op. cit p. 54.



or to do further for its Communion with the Eastern Churches. Roman church should actuate its catholicity by entering into communion with and embracing the other churches. The Apostolic Church of Rome could not be fully and actually catholic without fellowship with other apostolic churches. The other churches do have a part in shaping and unifying the church. They should not be made to feel that they are merely returning to an existing unity. The other churches should be enabled to see themselves as churches forming a communion of churches which is the sole hope of the future. These churches need Rome and Rome needs these churches to realise the unity of the Church of Christ.

The full ecclesial communion is not achieved merely because of the unwilling attitude of the eastern churches. The united Churches (or the uniate churches) at present feel often cribbed, erabbed and caged by the might of the Roman Church. As a result the uniate churches tend to become a group of closed communities, allowed at the most to exist but in no way called to expansion. They seem to be tolerated as uncomfortable out

growths meant to be instruments for the conversion of dissidents. "The example of the uniate churches is in many ways less than convincing as a model of reconciled diversity because of the way the massive weight of the Latin Church has affected the delicate balance of tradition and universality in the Eastern churches that are in Communion with the bishop of Rome. These churches do nevertheless witness to an inchoate adaptation of the Petrine ministry to varying ecclesial conditions"<sup>10</sup>. Some of the reasons for the hostile attitude of the separated Orientals and some of the reasons for the failure of the uniate churches came from the attitude and administrative policies of the Catholic Church or the Catholic hierarchy. On the one hand the uniate churches have to face the hostility of the separated eastern churches from where they came, and on the other hand they have to suffer from and feel themselves suffocated by the step-motherly and condescending attitude of some of the catholic authorities and administrators. For this reason the life of a uniate church like the Malankara Catholic Church is a struggle towards achieving a full ecclesial communion in the Church of Christ.

Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Panicker

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10. George H. Tavard, *The Church Community of Salvation*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Mennesotte 1992, p. 196.



# The Life and Ministry of the Indian Church Before the Synod of Diamper

The ancient church of India which was known as the church of the Thomas Christians traces back its origin in faith to St. Thomas, the Apostle. It had hierarchical relations with the Persian Church, but the administration of the church and that of the sacraments was carried on with adaptation to Indian life-style. It developed an ecclesial life quite in harmony with the culture of India. It also succeeded in maintaining its identity and unity till the 17th century. The sum total of the life-style of the Thomas Christians was generally known as 'Thomayude Margam' (Law of Thomas). The individuality of their church was "Indian in culture, Christian in religion and Oriental in worship."

## 1. The Origin of the Indian Church

The Indian tradition of the apostolate and martyrdom of St. Thomas in India is nearly as reliable as history. Its historicity is asserted by ancient writings, secular historical evidences, ecclesiastical oral traditions, writings of Fathers of the Church, visits to the tomb of the Apostle etc. According to the tradition St. Thomas landed on the Malabar coast in 52 A. D. and preached gospel to the indigeneous folk and several high caste Hindu families embraced christianity. St. Thomas ordained bishops and priests, established several churches and having thus arranged a new community of

christians, he passed on to the south-east coast of India for announcing the gospel. He suffered martyrdom at Mylapore in 72 A. D. Tradition says that the Thomas Christians of Malabar on the whole enjoyed peace during the early centuries and that they were highly favoured by the local rulers. On the Coromandal coast the christians were persecuted and many of them immigrated into different parts of Malabar.

It seems that the original christian community of Malabar has suffered a decline in course of time. But it was reconstituted and reinvigorated by groups of christians who came from Persia. Two of them are better known, one is associated with Thomas of Cana (4th c.) the other with two saintly men, Sapor and Prot (9/10th c.). The origin of the division into two endogamous groups, Northists and Southists, among the Thomas Christians traced by tradition to the arrival of the first group. According to the local tradition the Northists are the descendants of those evangelized by St. Thomas, the Apostle, while the Southists trace their origin to Thomas of Cana and other Syrian immigrants.

## 2. The Hierarchy of the Indian Church

According to Malabar tradition St. Thomas consecrated a certain Kepa as his successor and bishop. The same



tradition holds that he ordained priests and deacons from several families and thus organized the church of Malabar before he left for Mylapore. How far this tradition is credible and if at all St. Thomas had thus established an indigeneous hierarchy, how long did it last and when and how did the succession of bishops pass from the indigenous to the East Syrian Church etc. are things about which we know nothing. Anyhow, we know from Eusebius that towards the end of the second century Pantenus, a christian philosopher from Alexandria found christians in India<sup>1</sup>. Then the "Chronicle of Seert" makes reference to a bishop, named David who devoted himself to mission work in India between 250 and 300<sup>2</sup>.

It is beyond doubt that some kind of relation between the christians of India and the church of Persia existed from very early centuries. In the list of the bishops who attended the council of Nicea I in 325, is mentioned one John the Persian who was the bishop of the whole of Persia and Greater India. In another document he is called bishop of Fars (Persia)<sup>3</sup>. It is possible that he signed for the churches in Persia and India to indicate that a relation between the two communities already existed.

A clear and a precise picture of the relations between the two churches can be gathered from the letters of Patriarchs Mar Ishoyahb III (647/8 or 650/1) and Mar Timothy I (780 or 789-823). These letters bear testimony to the fact that the christians of India were juridically subject to the East

Syrian Church. The letter of Ishoyahb indicates that there were a number of christians in India. Though they were directly dependent on the metropolitan of Rew 'Ardashir' they had to acknowledge ultimately the supremacy of the patriarch according to church regulations.

In his letter Mar Timothy mentions the possibility of inter-marriages between christians of India and Persia. He says that in the election of the metropolitans the christians of India were primarily to abide by the advice of the patriarch and not their king. Only after the patriarch had approved the election the matter could be referred to the king.<sup>4</sup>

Mar Timothy also refers to some canonical abuses that had crept into the christian community of India, especially in the matter of ordination of metropolitans, bishops, priests and deacons. In his letter he addresses the archdeacon as the head of the faithful in India. It is a clear testimony to the position of the archdeacon of the church of India and his role till the beginning of the Padroado-jurisdiction. From the 9th century the church of India was undoubtedly in regular contact with the Persian church. According to Patriarch Theodosius (853-858) the metropolitan of India was to send his letter of consent and communion every six years.<sup>5</sup>

The bishop of the Thomas Christians called himself the metropolitan and Door of All India. Vatican Codex 22 speaks of Mar Jacob (1504-50/52) as metropolitan of the see of

1. Perumalil A.C., *The Apostles in India*, Patna, 1971, p. 108.

2. Young William G., *Handbook of Source-Materials for Students of Church History*, Madras, 1969, p. 29 (no. 29).

3. Mundadan A. M., *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I, Bangalore, 1984, p. 79.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 102.



the Thomas Christians and whole church of India. Bishop Alexander Parampil (1663-1687) also used this title.<sup>6</sup>

The Eastern patriarchs never erected any episcopal see in India, but only appointed bishops who established their residence in places of their choice. Some fixed their residence at Cranganore. This was probably a matter of convenience, Cranganore being a good harbour, or perhaps, of devotion as the church in the city was founded by St. Thomas. In 1567 Patriarch Abdiso, by the order of Pope Pius IV, erected Angamaly as a residential see with Mar Abraham as its metropolitan. When Roz SJ. the first Latin Bishop, was appointed to the see of Angamaly by Rome on 5 November 1599, it was presumed that Angamaly was the official see of the Thomas Christians.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. The Archdeacon of the Thomas Christians

The East Syrian bishops had to be practically content with the exercise of the power of order due to their ignorance of local language and customs. Therefore the effective administration of church was in the hands of Archdeacons who were native priests. The earliest historical document that shows the existence of such an office is around the year 800. Patriarch Timothy I (780-823) wrote to the archdeacon, the head of the Christians in India about the right norms to be followed in the ordination of the priests, bishops, metro-

politans and the patriarch.<sup>8</sup> There is also an opinion that the archdioconate of India was instituted at the initiative of Thomas of Cana.<sup>9</sup> But the regulation by which this dignity was granted to the family of Pakalomattom in hereditary succession, induces us to suppose that already before there existed some sort of authority in this family.

A Padiyola in the possession of the Pothanikatt family styles the archdeacon as 'Jathikku Karthavian' which means the head of the caste, i. e. the head of the Thomas Christians.<sup>10</sup> The archdeacon was next to bishop in dignity and enjoyed very great authority. He had great powers as the archdeacon of the Greek church.<sup>11</sup> He also enjoyed civil powers. The bishop with the archdeacon adjudicated the quarrels and other disputes.<sup>12</sup> Bishop Sebastiani reported to the Propaganda Congregation in 1681 that in Kerala the archdioconate was the only dignity among the ecclesiastics and was conferred freely by the archbishop or any other prelate actually governing the church. It was conferred on persons from the family of Campo (Pakalomattom). He was the head and prince of all Christians of St. Thomas, therefore he had great power and was greatly esteemed by the kings and princes of Malabar.<sup>13</sup> He had the title "Archdeacon of All-India".

### 4. The clergy of the Indian Church

#### a. Education and formation

Regarding the education and formation of the clergy Thomas

6. Beltrami G., *La Chiesa Caldea nel secolo dell'unione*, Roma, 1933, p. 253.

7. Podipara P. J., *The Thomas Christians*, Bombay, 1970, p. 72.

8. Mundadan A. M., *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 90ff.

10. Podipara P. J., *op. cit.*, p. 95; Kollaparambil J., *The Archdeacon of All-India*, Rome, 1972, p. 81.

11. Kollaparambil J., *op. cit.*, p. 186.

12. Mundadan A. M., *op. cit.*, p. 184.

13. Kollaparambil J., *op. cit.*, p. 162.



Christians followed the disciplines of the East Syrian Church. But they had a method and system of education peculiar to themselves. Their method of education was known as "Gurukula vasam". The word literally means 'living with the teacher'. The boy is sent to a teacher's house where he subjects himself entirely to the teacher and serves him as a dependant. The teacher, besides instructing the boy in letters, imparts to him a training and formation fitted for military service. Generally only men from a special caste called 'Panikar' could act as masters and teach the pupils. This was the method of education for the laity.

The education and formation of the clergy was something similar to that of the laity. A boy who aspires to priesthood inscribes himself as the disciple of a Malpan (teacher) who was generally the parish priest himself or the elderly priest of the parish. Under such malpans the candidate learns to read and understand Syriac, the liturgical language and to interpret the Sacred Scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

Besides these Malpanates there were also certain educational centres where a selected few were trained. The Venesian account of Joseph the Indian reads: "They (the Thomas Christians) have excellent doctors, study of letters; they have the book of Prophets just as we have".<sup>15</sup> Angamaly was a training centre of clerics who came from all parts of Malabar. Fr. Carniero visited this centre and reported thus: "In the region of Angamaly these christians have their

university. For there is a cathanar who is like a father among them and in him they had great confidence on account of his old age and learning. It is fifty years since he began teaching Sacred Scriptures and has many disciples from all parts of Malabar". He also explained the method of instruction: "The old cathanar taught Scripture in the Syriac language. The disciples who were beginners were exercised in writing and learning the alphabet; the method of learning was to write the lesson the master gave them and to exercise themselves in them"<sup>16</sup>.

The synod of Diamper gives a long list of the books which according to the Portuguese bishops, contained heresies. Archbishop Menezes ordered all these books to be destroyed or burned. The very names of the books mentioned by the synod of Diamper show that the clergy of the pre-Diamper period were keeping a rather high standard of learning in the Sacred Scripture and other ecclesiastical matters<sup>17</sup>.

#### b) Clerical celibacy

The priests in Malabar were generally married. In this matter they followed the discipline of the East Syrian Church. Joseph the Indian reports that the priests of Malabar lived in chastity. Here he might have meant conjugal chastity<sup>18</sup>. The priests kept conjugal chastity, that is after the death of the first wife they did not marry another. Fr. Carniero reported that he had found married priests in Malabar<sup>19</sup>.

14. Puthiakunnel T., *Syro-Malabar Clergy and their General Obligations*, Ernakulam, 1964, p. 65.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

16. Wicki J., *Documenta Indica*, III, Romae, 1954, p. 804.

17. Puthiakunnel T., *op. cit.*, p. 68

18. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 99.



There were also celibate clergy in Malabar. Fr. Vincenzo Maria OCD. says: "The ecclesiastics are of two sorts, ordinary and recollected. The latter are obliged to certain major observances, they never eat meat nor drink wine"<sup>20</sup>. The recollected were the monks who lived in chastity. There were several religious houses in Malabar when the Portuguese came to India. It seems that celibacy was formally and canonically prescribed for the Malabar clergy by Mar Abraham in the first synod of Angamaly in 1583<sup>21</sup>. The synod of Diamper decreed that no cleric in holy orders shall presume to marry, and those who are twice married or married widows, are declared bigamists, and unless they put away such women, they are considered to be living in public concubinage and so in mortal sin. The decree of the synod shows that priests were getting married even after ordination; nay more, they were marrying a second and a third time. It is possible that from 6th to the 8th century the bishops who came from Persia were married men, since the Persian bishops, resisting the canons, were getting married. But it seems that from 9th century onwards the bishops of Malabar were celibate men. The sixteenth century bishops were all celibate<sup>22</sup>.

### C. Clerical habit

In the early centuries in Malabar the priests were not distinguished from the laity in their dress except during the liturgical functions. Many of them

were engaging themselves in public negotiations like the lay people. According to the testimony of the synod of Diamper, in order to perform the secular activities more conveniently, the priests were comporting themselves just like laity. But from the testimonies of the missionaries we understand that the priests had some kind of dress distinct from the laity. In 1579 Monserrate says: "They were dressed in white just as the priests of Constantinople"<sup>23</sup>. Barbosa says: "They wear shirts and turban on their heads; they go barefoot and wear long beards"<sup>24</sup>. Vincenzo Maria reports: "In the house they were wearing only a shirt over the linen pants. In public they wore long vestment of white linen. A few use the same of black colour made tight at the waist with a leather belt, and so long as to reach almost to the ground. On the head they wear a kind of biretta which, as it rises upwards, is larger in size, and on the fingers very big rings. Outside the house all were carrying a kind of stick (walking stick) painted and twisted up at the upper part and it was similar to the episcopal croziers"<sup>25</sup>.

### d) Clerical residence

Regarding the obligation of residence the priests of the Thomas Christians followed the regulations of the East Syrian Church. They were exercising the care of souls in a collegiate form. They lived very near to the churches officiating in them in a collegiate form ... the clerics were

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20. Vincenzo Maria di S. Catharina O.C.D., *II Viaggio alle Indie Orientali*, Roma, 1672. p. 146. Puthiakunnel T., op. cit., p. 47
  21. Puthiakunnel T., op. cit., p. 100.
  22. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.
  23. Monserrate M., *Informacion de los Christianos de S. Thome (1579) Ms.*, ARSJ., Fondo Goa no. 33, folios 149-151. Puthiakunnel T., op. cit., p. 167.
  24. Barbosa D., *An account of the countries bounding on the Indian ocean and other inhabitants*, English edition by Mansel Longworth Dames, vol. II, p. 101.
  25. Vincenzo Maria, op. cit., p. 146.



obliged to the same residence<sup>26</sup>. The senior priest of each parish was the head of the community of the parish clergy. He distributed the offices of the church in turn among the priests of the parish. Priests were ordained according to the necessity of each parish and with the written consent of the parish assembly (Desakuri). They were ordained for the parish than for the diocese. Therefore they were obliged to serve their parish after their ordination.

The administration of the parishes was carried on by the assembly of the parishioners consisting of adult males and local priests. This parish assembly looked after the temporalities of the church. It also decided cases of public scandal and inflicted punishments including excommunication. The excommunicated were excluded from the church assembly and sacraments. To decide on matters of local interests representatives of several parishes used to assemble together, while things of general character were taken up by the assembly of the representatives of all churches.

### 5. Faith and Communion of the Thomas Christians

It is true that there were in use among the Thomas Christians books that contained Nestorian formulas and expressions which were of very subtle nature. It is also true that certain superstitious practices and errors had crept in among them. But in spite of all these they professed the orthodox faith. They had no reluctance to use the title "mother of God" even without qualification. Fr. Carniero, a Latin missionary, while talking to them said:

"Both you and we hold the same faith, the difference in customs matters little"<sup>27</sup>. Ferdinand Paz wrote in 1557 that a bishop who was among the Thomas Christians was of Nestorian race, but he found nothing of heresy among them.<sup>28</sup> In 1601 bishop Roz SJ wrote: "These Christians are certainly the oldest in the Orient... having been converted from idolatry to our Most Holy Faith by the Apostle St. Thomas; and although they had lived among the heathens, Jews and Mohemedans, they have till this time always stood very firm in the faith. Chaldean prelates infected with Nestorian heresy were set over them having been for this office deputed and sent hither from Babylon"<sup>29</sup>. This statement clearly affirms that the Thomas Christians have accepted their faith from St. Thomas and remained in it till 1601.

It is true that there was no communication between the Thomas Christians and Rome due to political and geographical circumstances. The absence of communication does not mean that they had no communion with Rome. They acknowledged the primacy of Rome. The history of the 16th century bears witness to this. When bishop Roz wrote about the steadfastness of the faith of the Thomas Christians he certainly included communion with Rome. When the Portuguese arrived in Malabar, they entered into relationship with Rome and spontaneously put themselves in touch with the Pope as his children. Therefore, the Thomas Christians did not separate themselves or consider themselves as separate from Rome, nor did Rome consider them as separate from her.

26. Puthiakunnel T., op. cit., pp. 204, 205.

27. Wicki J., op. cit., pp. 80ff.

28. Podipara P. J., op. cit., p. 110.

29. Ibid., p. 112.



## 6. The Liturgical life of Thomas Christians

As a result of the hierarchical relation with the Persian Church the Thomas Christians adopted the East Syrian Liturgy with certain adaptations to the local customs. They accepted it because it had various elements of interest that are common to both churches. The Christ-experience of St. Thomas was the common apostolic heritage. They both enjoyed a common sacred language (Syriac) of worship. They had a very great esteem and love for the East Syrian rite and language for the reason that Syriac was spoken by our Lord and St. Thomas. In 1579 their representatives wrote to Pope Gregory XIII "Our prayers are in the Syriac or Chaldean language which was given to us by our Lord St. Thomas"<sup>30</sup>.

Regarding the Eucharistic celebration it is difficult to specify how frequently the Thomas Christians celebrated it. Penteado says that there was no frequent celebration of the liturgy except in Lent, when it was celebrated every Sunday<sup>31</sup>. From the decrees of Diamper it can be concluded that there was Mass at least on Sundays and feast days. As a general custom in Malabar the Thomas Christians used to take a bath before going to church and put newly-washed clothes. At the entrance they washed their feet and wells were provided for it. This washing was a symbol of internal and external purity required to enter into the presence of God. On

entering the church they used to make a profound bow, the head touching the floor.<sup>32</sup>

From the reports of the missionaries it is clear that among the Thomas Christians the communion was an indispensable part of Mass and the whole congregation communicated in both species. As in the early church they consecrated a big loaf and it was divided and distributed. Hand communion was in practice.<sup>33</sup>

The churches of the Thomas Christians externally looked like non-Christian pagodas. The only distinction was the cross at the summit of the church. Men occupied the front part of the nave, and the women the rear part. There were separate doors for men and women to enter the church. The sanctuary was a little raised and is separated from the nave by a curtain. Every church had a copy of the Bible adorned with gold or silver and precious stones; only very rarely it was taken out of the sanctuary.<sup>34</sup> As in the Hindu temples the churches had flag staffs. A flag hoisted on such a staff indicates that a feast is being celebrated in the church.

## 7: The ascetical life of the Thomas Christians

The ascetical life of the Thomas Christians based on the theology, liturgy and canonical discipline of the East Syrian Church. It had also the influence of Hinduism. The Divine

30. Giamil S., *Genuinae relationes inter Sedem Apostolicam et Assyriorum Orientalium seu Chaldeorum Ecclesiam*, Romae, 1902. Podipara P. J., op. cit., p. 74.

31. Mundadan A. M., *Traditions of the St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, 1970, p. 164. Aerthayil Thomas, *The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, 1982, p. 128.

32. Ibid., p. 130-131.

33. Ibid., p. 134-135.

34. Podipara P. J., op. cit., p. 86.

liturgy and liturgical calendar were fully capable of involving the faithful into the salvation history which has its focal point in the mystery of Christ and of the church. Through the liturgical services especially through the Eucharist the Thomas Christians achieved their full christian meaning establishing a close relation with the Paschal mystery of Christ.

The Thomas Christians had accepted fasting as the most important form of their life of penance and their fasting was centered around the liturgy. From the testimonies of the missionaries we come to know of several fastings which they observed with strictness and spontaneity: 1. Lent, 2. Advent, 3. The fifty days fast of the Apostles, 4. The fast of Assumption, 5. The fast of Ninivites, 6. The fast before the nativity of our Lady, 7. The fast before the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, 8. The fast of Wednesdays and Fridays, 9. The fast of 12 Fridays after Christmas, 10. The fast of Elias, 11. The fast of the virgins, 12. The fast of Transfiguration, 13. The Vigil fast of the Nativity of our Lord, Pentecost, Ascension, Assumption and of the patrons of the respective churches. According to this list the Thomas Christians were fasting 290 days in (practice 225 days because of overlapping). During the fast days they abstained from fish, meat, milk products and wine. They also abstained from conjugal rights. Fasting lasted till sunset when the only meal of the day was taken.<sup>35</sup>

#### 8. The social life of the Thomas Christians

The Thomas Christian community is an example of a community which

had adjusted itself to the environment in which it had to live and function for centuries. One wonders at the spontaneity with which they adjusted themselves to its milieu at least as far as the social life was concerned. This natural impulse led to the acceptance of certain superstitious practices and customs. The synod of Diamper corrected them but it went a step further to discourage the spirit of spontaneity of adaptation.

The Thomas Christians held a high position in the socio-political life of the society in Kerala. They enjoyed the privilege of being called the sons of the kings. They were allowed to have military force of their own. They used to carry arms with them. In traditional churches they had an 'ayudhapura' where they kept their arms before entering church for worship. They were trained in the use of weapons at the age of eight and continued to exercise them till twenty-five. Under these circumstances others recognized the power of the Thomas Christians and gave them a status equal to that of high caste Hindus. The granting of privileges by the rulers is a clear sign that the latter accepted the social position of the former.

As regards the occupation, the Thomas Christians were engaged in agriculture, trade and military service. They were predominantly agriculturists. They had the monopoly in pepper growing and were also competent in paddy-growing and coconut-growing. As far as trade is concerned they do not appear to have done well at the arrival of the Portuguese. It seems that a few of them took part in the oversea trade.<sup>36</sup> But they were excellent soldiers.

35. Aerthayil T., op. cit., p. 167.

36. Mundadan A. M., History of Christianity in India, op. cit., p. 156.



A new-born babe was fed with powdered gold mixed with honey or ghee immediately after its birth. At the time of baptism it was given a name taken from the Old Testament or the New Testament. But the child gets also a call name which is quite indigenous. At the age of five the child is initiated into the letters of alphabet by his father or the Guru (teacher). A child begins to learn the alphabet by writing the first letter with his finger in raw husked rice, a distinctive custom of the high caste Hindus. After this initiation the child is sent to the local school for further studies. Generally the teachers were Hindus. But they taught the christian children even the christian prayers and catechism.<sup>37</sup>

The father is supreme in the family. Men and women would not sit or eat together. At meals wives would serve their husbands, and would eat only after the husbands had finished. Only sons would be the heirs of the properties of the father. One without a male issue would adopt as his heir a male related to him in the male line. Sometimes in the absence of male children a daughter is made to stay in the family with her husband.

The houses of the Thomas Christians usually located around the church. They had wooden walls and the roofs were thatched with plaited palm leaves. In the selection of the sites of the houses and in details of structure they conform to the Hindu style of architecture. Except in towns, their houses faced the east or the north; a well and a cowshed also could be seen near the house.

The men dressed very much like the nayars. The Christian women were much more modestly dressed than the nayar women. All, both men and women, went barefoot except the priests. In the matter of hygiene and cleanliness they were as good as the high caste Hindus. Their daily meals consisted of rice and curry. Alcoholic drinks were considered unbecoming to their high social status.<sup>38</sup> During the social feasts they would eat with their fingers squatting on long mattresses, their plates being plantain leaves folded in two. Neyyappam, Aini and Kozhukkotta are the edibles special to the Thomas Christians and the Brahmines.

As regards the marriage they followed several local social customs such as ceremonial baths, feeding of the boy and girl with sweets both before and after marriage. The girl's parents had to give a sum of money as dowry to the boy. Instead of wedding ring the boy ties a gold ornament 'tali' around the neck of the girl. A cross of 21 minute beads distinguishes the christian tali from the Brahmine one. The thread on which to hang the tali has to be taken out from the bridal veil (manthrakodi). They also had other customs such as 'adachthura' (shutting and opening of the bridal chamber prescribed in the East Syrian Rite), 'Kolvilakku' (a peculiar lighted lamp of the Hindu) etc. Even in the midst of Hindus and other non-christians, divorce was unheard of among the Thomas Christians. Widows would marry only after the period of mourning. Mothers after the birth of a child would not enter the church except after 40 days.<sup>39</sup>

37. Podipara P. J., op. cit., p. 81.

38. Ibid., p. 82. Brown L. W., *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Cambridge 1956, pp. 202ff.

39. Podipara, op. cit., pp. 90,91

The Thomas Christians followed the East Syrian rite for the burial of the dead. But they adopted certain local customs with regard to the burial and commemoration of the dead. After the burial the priest would bless a tender coconut, drink a little of it and then give the rest to be tasted by the relatives of the deceased. Then a vegetable meal is served to all the assembled persons. Like the Hindus, the Thomas Christians also celebrated 'pula' (means defilement, celebrated on the 11th after the death) and 'chatham' (celebrated on the anniversary day of the death) by prayers and blessing of the priests. Those invited to this would offer money in a plate and receive the kiss of peace from the priest. The money thus offered would be utilised in suffrage for the daed<sup>40</sup>.

The Thomas Christians enjoyed high social status and numerous privileges under the local rulers. These privileges were recorded on Copper Plates and granted to the christians. They were the 'magna carta' of the Thomas Christians. The Thomas Christians were known as 'Nazrani mapilas' (christian nobles). All these show that they had a social status next only to the Brahmins.

### 9. The moral life of the Thomas Christians

The moral life of the Thomas Christians could be understood only against the background of their social and religious context. They were always esteemed and patronized by their rulers as much for their general fidelity and regard for truth, as for

their skill and military powers. According to F. Day they were very faithful and trustworthy.<sup>41</sup> Gouvea says that no other community had as great value and esteem among the Malavars as the Syrian Christians.<sup>42</sup>

The Thomas Christians were courteous, tolerant and modest. These courteous manners contributed in great measure to preserve the peace and unity in Kerala before the arrival of the Portuguese. The writers praised them for their modest and respect for elders. "They pay strict attention to the fifth commandment, to honour their father and mother, applying it to all their governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters. They never sit in the presence of their parents, seniors, elder brothers, ministers or superiors of any description... In their assemblies none speak but the oldest and most eminent persons present, the younger never presuming to open their lips unless questioned by their elders... When two syrians meet on the road, they greet each other with 'stuthi'."<sup>43</sup>

As a result of these good moral qualities, quarrels and moral evils were rare among the Thomas Christians. Vincenzo Maria, an Italian missionary, testified that murder was unknown among them. He admired their conduct and contrasted it with the frequent assassinations in the other parts of the catholic world.<sup>44</sup> Their women were famous for their modesty and chastity. In fact their dress and behaviour reflected their character. The missionaries admired their innocence and simplicity. Paulinus of Bartholomeo said: "One cannot find here the vice

40. Ibid., p. 92.

41. Day F., *The Land of Perumals of Cochin, its past and present*, Madras, 1863, p. 219.

42. Aerthayil T., *op. cit.*, p. 204.

43. Ananthakrishna Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians, Ernakulam*, 1926, p. 243.

44. Vincenzo M., *op. cit.*, p. 151.



and customs of the Europeans who have already corrupted the coastal cities of India<sup>45</sup> From these it is clear that even the Europeans who had doubt about the faith of the Thomas Christians, had high appreciation and esteem for their religious and moral life.

### Conclusion

Vatican II exhorts the catholics, through dialogue and collaboration

with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men as well as the values in their society and culture<sup>46</sup>. Long before the council the Thomas Christians put this exhortation into practice. We have seen how these christians accepting faith in Christ and Gospel morality, continued to live a way of life in conformity with the customs and traditions of their country.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Pallipurathukunnel

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45. Paulinus a S. Bartholomeo, *Viaggio alle Indie Orientali*, Romae, 1796, p. 108.

46. Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, n. 2

# The Cultural Dimensions of the Syro Malabar Church

The Syro-Malabar Church has the distinction of being the most ancient Christian Community of India and the Far East.<sup>1</sup> According to the occasional remarks of medieval travellers and according to the accounts of the Portuguese, it seems that, these early Christians were not in anyway regarded as foreigners. Scholars agree that they were undoubtedly Christian, although, they had become assimilated in customs and manners to the Indian way of life around them.<sup>2</sup> They have been so rooted in the Indian soil, that their customs have developed in conformity with the social atmosphere of ancient India, and, except for their faith and morals, they have been hardly distinguishable from their compatriots of other creeds. The apostolic gift became the soul of the religious-cultural synthesis. This is the first sporadic evidence of indigenous Christianity in India, an evidence that has turned to be highly important point of reference for Indian Christians today. Their spontaneous adaptation stands as a perpetual and concrete manifestation of the natural universality of Christianity. It can be

stated beyond doubt that the vision of Vat II, on inculturation in *Gaudium et spes*<sup>3</sup> is anticipated in the life of the Pre-Seventeenth Century Malabar Church.

## In this study relevant ?

The present study has a special relevance in the context of the identity crisis and liturgical controversy that rocks the Malabar Church these days. There is a hue and cry for inculturation and Indianization. At this juncture there should be an indepth study of the true identity of our apostolic gift and patrimony. The Church teaches that:- All members of the Eastern Churches should be firmly convinced that they can and ought always to preserve their own legitimate liturgical rites and ways of life, and that changes are to be introduced only to forward their own organic development.<sup>4</sup> They themselves are to carry out all the prescriptions with the greatest fidelity. They are to aim always at a more perfect knowledge and practice of their rites, and if they have fallen away due to circumstances

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1. E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*, Culcutta, 1957, preface.
  2. Askoparpola and Bent Smiat Hanser, *South Asian Religion and society, studies in Asian topics*, No.11, Scandinavian institute of Asian studies, Riverdale 1986, p. 273
  3. Austin Flannery, *Vat II*, Gs. 53-62, St. Paul publications, Bombay, 1975, pp. 860-869.
  4. Flannery op. cit OE 5, p. 404.



of times or persons, they are to strive to return to their ancestral traditions.<sup>5</sup>

The Council further teaches that there must be no innovation unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them, and care must be taken that any new form adopted should in some way grew organically from forms already existing.<sup>6</sup> Hence, there is no place for an inculturation based on an artificial foundation. Indianization does not mean mutilation of the traditional liturgical heritage. Pope John Paul II says that inculturation is a difficult process, but it must in no way compromise with the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.<sup>7</sup>

While speaking to the Armenian synod of Bishops in Rome on 19th November 1992, the Holy Father John Paul II, reminds the Eastern Churches of their Ecumenical significance. "It should never be forgotten that your tradition like the other Eastern traditions, has an altogether special value<sup>8</sup> To loose that tradition or to compromise its genuineness would be an irreparable loss for the whole Church. In this regard the decree U. R. says the following: Everyone should realise that it is of Supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve, and foster the rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches in order faithfully to preserve, the fullness of the Christian tradition and to bring about reconciliation

between the Eastern and Western Christians.<sup>9</sup>

Eastern traditions were born from a living and dynamic experience of the Church. They were so attentive to the culture and sensitivity of the times that today too, they represent a model, one perhaps unsurpassed, of what is called inculturation. It would be sad, if those Churches today were to risk closing themselves off in their own past, without examining their own original heritage. They will be able to overcome this danger more easily if they are open to an encounter with other ecclesial experiences, without however surrendering their own particularity, but enriching it with the stimuli and perspectives that stem from others experiences.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Christian faith of the Ancient Church in India**

The ancient Church of India received the Christian faith as an apostolic gift. At the very beginning of the Christian era, the evangelical message was brought to India by one of the men who had heard directly the teaching of Jesus the one who touched with his fingers the glorious wounds of Christ.<sup>11</sup> The Malabar Christians expressed and celebrated this faith in the East Syrian Liturgy. They had a remarkable vision of preserving, perfecting, redeeming, sanctifying and ennobling the Socio-cultural set up of the Society. They

5. Ibid OE 5, p. 404.

6. Ibid SC. 23, p. 29.

7. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991, No. 52, p. 66.

8. Pope John Paul II, *preserve your spiritual Heritage*, *L'osservatore Romano*, week. Eng. ed 2 Dec 1992 p. 2.

9. Flannery op. cit, UR No. 15 p. 424.

10. Pope John Paul II, *L'osservatore Romano*, 2 Dec 1992. p. 3.

adapted or rather Christianised their ancient culture in almost all its aspects. The ancient Church of Malabar was a religio-Socio-Cultural synthesis.

### **The Church and Apostolic Christ experience**

Every Church has to trace its origin to the apostolic experience of the Risen Lord. It is unique and specific<sup>12</sup>. Every individual church to be authentic, has to be faithful to this apostolic testimony<sup>13</sup>. As the development of the individual Church is linked with its origin, the original apostolic experience is decisive for its individuality and growth. The "Apostolic Christ experience" or the "word" does not exist in the abstract, but concretely in the particular, liturgical, spiritual, disciplinary and Socio-Cultural expressions of faith. If the original apostolic Christ experience remains a Constituent of every individual Church, through its cultural transmutation through Centuries, the growth of it, to be authentic, should be in harmony with those expressions of faith, through which the apostolic Christ experience is handed down to the Church<sup>14</sup>.

### **Liturgy the Most important Faith Expression**

The Liturgy is no doubt the most important faith expression. The Church Celebrates its mysteries and expresses its faith through the liturgical Celebration<sup>15</sup>. This is the reason why the

different apostolic Churches are mainly specified and identified by their Liturgies. The rite is not to be limited to the liturgy of the Church. Even though the liturgy becomes the culminating expression of faith, there are other expressions such as the Kerygma, Catechesis, spirituality, discipline etc. which all together constitute the individual Church<sup>16</sup>.

### **The Western garb of the Indian Church**

The British left India, and India became independent in 1947. Indianise the Indian Christianity is the loud Cry, one hears in many a circle.<sup>17</sup> The quest for an Indian Church is not a new phenomenon. There has been a growing Consciousness - a sort of guilt feeling among some of the Indian Christians that Christianity had not yet had a serious encounter with the Indian Culture, philosophy, and religions, that Christianity still wears the garb of non - Indian culture<sup>18</sup>. Many seem to be ignorant of the fact that the Thomas Christians of Malabar are as old as Christianity itself. They kept up and lived this apostolic gift with an individuality of their own. This individuality was shaped by their cultural environment based on the Socio-Political set up of the society. To a casual observer the Thomas Christians appeared as one of the Indian Castes. They were Indian in their Socio-Political formation and way of life. The Culture around them

11. E. Tisserant, clergy monthly Vol XVI, November 1952, Foreward p. 316.
12. I Jn:1:1-4; 1 cor 15:8-9; 1 pt:1:16-20.
13. Thomas Vellilamthadam (et al. eds) Ecclesial identity of the Thomas Christians, OIRSI, Kottayam 1985, p. 42.
14. Ibid p. 84.
15. Flannery cop. cit. SC. No. 2, p. 21.
16. Vellilamthadam op. cit p. 45.
17. Placid Podipara, The Malabar Christians, prakasan publications, Aleppy, 1972, p. 27.
18. A. Mathias Mundadan, Indian Christians, search for identity and struggle for autonomy, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore. 1984, p. 178.



was Christianised by their faith and made doubly oriental by their Syro-oriental mode of worship. It was a wonderful fusion and mingling of Indian Culture, Christian faith and Syro-Oriental worship. Hence the Thomas Christians were more Indians than what the modern Indianisers would make their Christians look like<sup>19</sup>.

The advocates of "Indian Church" and "one rite" movement speak of a new Church in India with native elements. Here, one should bear in mind that Christianity came to be associated with Europe, European culture, and colonialism because of the introduction in to the country, of protestantism and of the Latin Church, the work of European missionaries and the patronage given to Christianity by colonial powers, from the sixteenth Century onwards. In the public worship of the Church Western practices and Western music and in art Western architecture of Churches were introduced. The life style of Indian Christians were affected; European social customs were imitated by the new Christians. European dress, dancing, smocking, eating beef, drinking and other social customs were copied by the Indian Christians. All these created a poor image of Christianity in India.<sup>20</sup> They fail to take note of the existence of the Church of St. Thomas in India from early centuries. The Syrian Christians have a history

of power and privilege that dates many centuries before the coming of the European rule.<sup>21</sup> Educated Indians usually make a distinction between Latin and oriental Churches:<sup>22</sup>

### Social Status

For the high caste Hindus the touch of a Thomas Christian was sufficient to purify articles defiled by the touch or near approach of the low caste people. Hence the non-Christian Kings often made Thomas Christian families live near their royal residence in order to profit by their service to purify defiled articles.<sup>23</sup> The Syrian warriors, trades, and Church notables were honoured and rewarded by Malayali Hindu rulers and the group has long been regarded itself as ritually superior to all other Christian Convert groups.<sup>24</sup> They distinguished themselves in such professions as agriculture, trade and military service. John Maringnoli, papal legate to China in 1348, says that they were proprietors of pepper and masters of the public weighing office in Quilon in the middle of the XIV century.<sup>25</sup> A renowned anthropologist Anantha Krishna Ayyar observes that the Syrian Christians were trained in the use of weapons at the early age of eight years, and continued to exercise them till twenty years. They were held in much esteem by the rulers of the country.<sup>26</sup> This

19. Podipara, *The Malabar Christians*, p. 28.

20. Mattam, *op. cit* p. 112

21. Susan Baily, *Saints, Goddesses and kings (Muslims and Christian in South Indian society, 1700-1900)* South Asian Studies 43, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 251-252.

22. Mattam *op. cit* p. 115.

23. Placid Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, St. Paul Publications, Bombay, 1970, p. 83.

24. Susan Baily *op. cit*, p. 243.

25. Podipara *op. cit* p. 83.

26. Anathakrishna Ayyer, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, Ernakulam, 1929. 56.

made the non-Christian Kings build Churches and endow them with tax free lands. This benefaction by rulers provide one of the earliest indication of the Syrian integration with in the society of the region. The term integration being used here to convey a position of high status and acceptance with in the regions most prestigious social and religious institutions.<sup>27</sup>

### **“One Rite” Movement and Inculturation**

There is a strong movement in Kerala and other parts of India in favour of a single rite for all Indian Catholics. The laymen and priests who are active in promoting this movement have brought to the notice of the ecclesiastical authorities, their view that the presence of more than one rite is the chief cause of dissension among Catholics here. In asking for one rite they mean a new one calculated to express the life and worship of Indian Catholics in terms of Indian culture.<sup>28</sup> One single rite for India may mean:- (a) one single autonomous Indian Church or rite with a single liturgy or (b) one liturgy for the three autonomous particular Churches or rites in India. To realise the former, all the three will have to be fused into one or any two of them in to the third. The latter could be realised by the adoption of a single liturgy by each of the three Churches in India. In all there cases, one liturgy is envisaged, and one that is to be formed on the basis of Indian culture. In the event of such a particular Church

or rite with a single liturgy come to be, the ideal, according to the general conception, would be to have, one ecclesiastical jurisdiction in one and the same territory.<sup>29</sup> Any basic division of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction therefore, should follow the basic differences in the ecclesial reality of the Christians.<sup>30</sup>

### **“One Rite” an Utopian idea without a Theological Basis**

The ancient liturgies are each a sacred tradition of inestimable human, historical, and religious value. Each is a treasure from which the Church draws out things old and new. The axiom “lex orandi lex credendi” has a special application to them, for they are the expression of the faith contained in scripture and tradition as set for as by the Fathers of the Church<sup>31</sup>

Various ecclesiastical traditions and Liturgies are part of the divinely revealed undivided heritage of the universal Church.<sup>32</sup> No new liturgy will be a substitute for this. The constitution on sacred Liturgy teaches that, care must be taken, that any new form adopted should in some way grew organically from forms already existing.<sup>33</sup> It is to be noted that India is a multi-cultural country. Therefore one culture alone cannot be made the basis for an Indian rite.<sup>34</sup> The three rites have been the Christian way of life of many in the country for generations; they have come to stay. So “one rite” for India is neither

27. Susan Baily op. cit p. 250.

28. Podipara, The Malabar Christians. p. 67.

29. Ibid p. 68.

30. Christian Orient, March-June (1986), p. 31.

31. Podipara, Malabar Christians, p. 75.

32. Flannery, OE No. 1, p. 402; UR 14-18.

33. Ibid SC. No. 23 p. 29.

34. Mattam, op. cit, p. 112.



an ideal nor a workable proposition but a ridiculous solution.<sup>35</sup>

### **Inculturation in the Malabar Church.**

The term inculturation expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of Incarnation. We can say of Catechesis as well as of Evangelization in general, that, it is to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose catechesis will seek to know these cultures, and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer to these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought.<sup>36</sup> Christ has made use of the religion and culture of the Jewish people to convey his message. In order to understand the human Christ we have to go to the Jewish sources.<sup>37</sup>

The Church is a living organism; a living body. The Church of the 20th century is the result of the life and growth of the infant Church for the past twenty centuries. And during that life especially in the early period, the Church had absorbed elements from the semitic, Greek and Roman cultures and many of these elements have become part of the universal Christian heritage. It would be impossible to eliminate all these cultural

elements from the Church and its Liturgy without dismembering the body of Christ.<sup>38</sup> Pope John Paul II says: In the one hand, the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted; [The Biblical world or more correctly the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived] nor without serious loss, from the culture in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.<sup>39</sup>

### **Necessity of the full Heritage**

Inculturation must be guided by two basic principles:- a) Compatibility with the Gospels b) Communion with the universal Church. Bishop's, as guardians of the "deposit of faith", will take care, to ensure fidelity and, in particular, to provide discernment, for which a deeply balanced approach is required. Since culture is a human creation and in therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be healed, ennobled and perfected.<sup>40</sup> The safeguarding of traditional value is the work of a mature faith.<sup>41</sup> The Church needs her full heritage. She becomes impoverished if the individual Churches being uprooted from their heritage give up what is their own and simply imitate the practices of another individual Church. Servile imitation destroys one's own identity and authenticity.

35. Ibid. p. 122.

36. Pope John Paul II *Catechesi Tradendae*, Octo. 16, 1979 England, Society of St. Paul No. 53, p. 48.

37. Mattam op. cit p. 109.

38. Ibid p. 110.

39. *Catechesi Tradendae*, op. cit. No. 53, p. 48.

40. *Redemptoris missio* op. cit, No. 54, p. 69.

41. Ibid No. 54, p. 69.

The apostolic heritage is not the monopoly of a single individual Church. The communion of various apostolic Churches constitute the Catholic heritage of the universal Church. It is in this ecclesiological perspective that the heritage of the Thomas Christians has to be understood and appreciated. The Church of the Thomas Christians in India, which is as old as Christianity itself, has to interpret her authentic tradition in order to enrich the universal Church which is a communion of Churches.<sup>42</sup>

The present Liturgical crisis that has caused lot of confusion in the Syro-Malabar Church is the product of the latinising policy of the Portuguese rule ever since 1599 to 1896. The pre-seventeenth century Church of Kerala lived the apostolic faith. It was Indian in life style and East Syrian in Liturgy. The arrival of the portuguese in 1498 exerted a deep impact on the Indian Church. The portuguese distorted the identity, shattered the unity and destroyed the autonomy of the Church. The Thomas Christians resented the the latinization movements of the portuguese, that was initiated in the synod of Diampar in 1599. The history of the Malabar Church from 1599 to 1896 is one of agonising struggle being under the jurisdiction of padroado, propaganda, Jesuits and Carmelites.

### The solution to the Problem

The Liturgical crisis in the Malabar Church can be resolved only by deep study and research. Obedience to the directives of the magisterian is of supreme importance. Pope Pius the 11th initiated the process of the restoration of the Malabar Liturgy on Dec 1, 1934. It has to be brought to its perfection. Pope John Paul II, while addressing the Syro-Malabar bishops in Rome on 28th August 1980

reminded them that:- a) Traditions to be kept intact b) Reforms could be brought in only to further the organic growth c) If the Church has gone astray from the traditions, she should come back to it d) The directives of the document "Dominicae Cenae" should be taken as guide lines<sup>43</sup>.

In another directive Cardinal Rubin, the then prefect of the Oriental Congregation told the bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church :- 1) Not to use any text even for experiment that is not approved by the Holy See and the Bishop's Conference. 2) Adaptation of the Liturgy should be in accordance with the papal documents *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Catechesi Tradendae*, *Dominicae Cenae*, *Inestimabile Donum* 3) In order, not to repeat the mistake of 1962, priests and laymen should be trained well in Liturgy.<sup>44</sup>

In the light of the documents of Vat II and the directives of the Popes, the restoration and adaptation of the Syro-Malabar Liturgy is to be brought about. Till the synod of Diamper the Malabar Church used the anaphoras of Theodore and Nestorius. They were adapted from the Byzantine tradition in the 6th century. These are to be restored and brought in to use, together with the anaphora of Addai and Mari, so that the faithful may relish the full spiritual heritage of the Malabar Church<sup>45</sup>

There is a provision for a fourth anaphora. It could be prepared and introduced. But it should be within the framework of the structure, spirituality and Theology of the Malabar Church. Indian cultural and religious elements could be integrated in it.<sup>46</sup> In order to achieve the same deep study and proper Theological reflection is required.

Fr. Sebastian Thundathil CST

42. Vellilamthadom op. cit. p. 88-89.

43. Thomas Manooramparambil, Syro-Malabar Sabayude Charithra pachathalam, OIRSI, 1986, p. 191-192.

44. Ibid p. 171-172      45. Ibid p. 245-250.      46. Ibid p. 251-261.



# Indigenising Christianity in the Yoruba Community

## Introduction

This is an age of Religious Pluralism<sup>1</sup> where no religion could no longer be studied in isolation as a result of the phenomena of acculturation and inculturation. In order to effectively discuss the phenomenon of contextualisation of Christianity in the Nigerian context, the proper role of the traditional religion is essential<sup>2</sup>. Christianity, particularly the Orthodox Christianity would be meaningless in the Nigerian community without actually relating it to the traditional religion<sup>3</sup>. In a nutshell, there is an interaction between the indigenous religion of the people and Christianity. As the two religions flow into each other, a sort of tolerance is maintained. This is the only way we could maintain and experience religious co-fraternity in the Nigerian community.

## Limitation

In reference and examples this article is limited to the Yoruba community. This is to allow for a deeper understanding of the topic since the author is more familiar with the Yorubaland than the whole of the Nigerian community.

## Methodology

In this article, I shall use the phenomenological approach to the study of religion whereby I see the practice of the religion as the people see it without making any preconceived judgement.

Secondly I shall use the method of interaction as a Methodology i.e. I shall examine the two religions as they interact taking note of their

1. The phenomenon of Religious Pluralism is glaring in the Nigerian community since Nigeria is more or less the melting pot for the major religions of Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion.
2. African Traditional Religion, the autochthonous religion of the Yoruba community is noted to play very important roles in the contextualisation of Christianity. For further details see My papers titled "The Impact of African Traditional Religion and Culture upon the Aladura Churches" in *Asia Journal of Theology*, volume 6, No. 1, April 1992 pp. 130-140 and "The phenomenon of African Christianity vis a vis adoption of the Bible and cultural Awareness in Nigeria" in *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, Vol. VI, No. 2, October 1991; pp. 90-105.
3. Orthodox Christianity is an abstract faith. It does not easily appeal to the philosophy of the traditional community.

areas of similarities and differences. The kernel point in the methodology is to reconcile areas of differences and embrace areas of contact in the major religions of Christianity and African traditional Religion.

In order to realise the intention of the author, the following shall be observed systematically.

- I. Traditional Religion in Yorubaland
- II. Christianity in Yorubaland
- III. Interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion
- IV. The birth of African Christianity
- V. Contextualisation of Christianity and the Modus Operandi

#### Traditional Religion in Yorubaland

In the Yoruba traditional religion, Olodumare occupies a very central position. He is regarded a being of unique character possessing many attributes. He is credited among the Yoruba with omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. He is regarded as the just and impartial judge sometimes meting out judgement on the wicked in this world and certainly bringing all men to judgement in the next world.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the belief in Olodumare, the Yoruba believe in a panoply

of deities which are the emissaries of Olodumare. Among the Principal divinities are Orisanla, Orunmila, Ogun etc.

In Yoruba traditional Religion, there is also the belief in ancestors, magic, medicine, witchcraft, sorcery and the After-life.

It is however important to emphasise that with the arrival of Christianity there are some changes<sup>5</sup>. These will be dealt with appropriately in this work.

#### Christianity in Yorubaland (1840–1900)

African Traditional Religion is as old as the Yorubas, while Christianity is a new phenomenon. The following Yoruba saying is apposite:

*Ile la ba fa  
Ile la ba mole  
Osan gangan ni igbagbo woledé<sup>6</sup>*

We met Ifa at home  
We met divinities at home,  
But Christianity arrived late in the day.

Ifa or Orunmila is a divinity in the Yoruba traditional pantheon. There is a variant to this song with no basic difference in meaning:

*Aye la ba fa  
Aye la ba mole  
Osan gangan ni igbagbo wole de<sup>7</sup>*

We met Ifa in the world  
We met divinities in the world  
Christianity entered late in the day.

4. See E. O. Babalola "The interaction between the Muslims and the African Traditional Society: The Akoko Yoruba as a Case Study." *Asia Journal of Theology* Volume 5, No. 2, October 1991 p. 265.

5. These changes occur because Christianity is alien to the community.

6. See E. O. Babalola "The Interaction of Islam and Christianity in Akoko, Yorubaland", *Orita, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XVIII/2, Dec. 1986, pp. 93.

7. Ibid. p. 94.



These two sayings indicate that the Christian faith is very recent. It is worth noting, moreover, while the towns to the coast of Nigeria had contact with the white men as early as the 16th century, the interland of Yorubaland had contact with them very late.<sup>8</sup> For example, only in the second half of the 19th century did white men begin to explore Yorubaland for the purpose of religions and political expansion.

Christianity gained access into Yorubaland in 1842 through Badagry.<sup>9</sup> The leader of this Missionary effort was the Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman, the energetic and indefatigable superintendent of the Methodist Mission at Cape Coast. Urged by the pioneering success of the Methodists in Yorubaland, the local committee of the CMS in Sierra Leone sent out Reverend Henry Townsend on 4 January 1843.<sup>10</sup> Both Freeman and Townsend, one after the other, were very warmly received by the liberated slaves repatriated from Sierra Leone, and the Paramount chief of the Egba, Sodeke and his Chiefs. The main CMS Mission was led by Townsend, in whose retinue were Reverend C. A. Gollmer and Samuel Ajayi Crowther, these arrived in Yorubaland in 1845.

The attempt of the Missionaries to proceed to Abeokuta was forestalled by the sudden death of Sodeke, and they were constrained to stay in Badagry and improve the life of the nascent community of christian there. There was no overt hostility to the missionaries, but the hold of the traditional religion on the people was very firm. According to one report,

"the traditional priests had taken alarm at Sodeke's eager welcome of Christian Missionaries and in their jealous-fear of losing their own power had poisoned him."<sup>11</sup> The persistent followers of the traditional religion had welcomed Christian missionaries not because they wanted Christianity but because they were weak and poor and hoped that the missionaries would attract some trade back to the town.<sup>12</sup>

There is no doubt that the campaign against the slave trade had brought ruin and bad times to Badagry. Since the land was relatively infertile, the only hope was the introduction of trade by the missionaries.

At this juncture it is worth noting that the people who advocated the introduction of Christianity into Yorubaland were not members of the traditional society but the westernised liberated slaves who felt that they were missing in Nigeria the sort of Western Education, literacy and Christian companionship which they used to enjoy in Freetown. Moreover, they wanted their people to benefit from the light they had got abroad.

Between 1843 and 1846 Christian stations were established in Badagry and Abeokuta. By 1851 after the British had suppressed the slave trade in Lagos, the block between Lagos and Abeokuta was cleared. Missionaries now had unrestricted movement between Lagos and Abeokuta Mission houses, churches and schools were erected, and the children of the soil were sponsored to read abroad; sermons were preached and converts made. The people paid special attention to Rev. Ajayi Crowther, whose

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8. Ibid. p. 94.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid. p. 95.

mother was one of the first batch to be baptised in Abeokuta.

On 5 February 1848 "a priestess of Ifa and four of Crowther's own nieces were baptised at the sametime. But the source of this statement adds:

Though the people vaguely recognised a Supreme God, whom they called "Olorun" the worship of the city centred round deities such as Orunmila (the god of wisdom), Ogun (the god of iron), Sango (the god of thunder) and perhaps a powerful spirit believed to dwell in the Olumo rock and worshipped in the largest of its caves. Sacrifices were consistently offered and the people held the gods in awe.<sup>13</sup>

This was an indication that the traditional worship was very deeply ingrained and that those who seemed to accept the new faith found it difficult to sever connections entirely from the traditional worship.

### Interaction between Christianity and African traditional Religion

Since no religion can exist in isolation, orthodox christianity and the indigenous religion had to interact. This interaction was not a favourable one since orthodox christianity came in the European garb - i. e. the world view of the European is different from the world view of the Africans. In that light the white man's christianity is definitely different from the Black man's Christianity. In a nutshell, African world view takes cognisance of the existence of spirits and spiritual forces and that

these spirits could be responsible for the enormities experienced in life. Comparing this with the western worldview, there is the absence of spirits and spiritual forces. In the light of this, the Western world view does not believe that witches and sorcerers could be responsible for a bulk of the problems that come across the African people. Unless Christianity is situated on the platform of the African World view, it will be irrelevant to the African. The African Independent Churches understand this better than the Orthodox churches. According to C. O. Oshun:

Invariably, Mission Christianity would appear to lack necessary and sufficient grasp of the ultimate issues of life relevant to an African world view. It therefore, could have no solution to such problems as witchcraft, demon possession, barrenness, failure in life and sicknesses or diseases which are not susceptible to clinical diagnosis.<sup>14</sup>

In the light of the above, introducing Christianity without derobing it of the Western culture for the African culture, is like fixing a square peg in a round hole. In this paper, Christianity shall be derobed of the western culture thereby making it relevant to the African milieu.

### The Birth of African Christianity

More often than not it is the observation of the author and some scholars that the Bible has not been properly applied to the life situations of the Africans. The Bible is not meant to compete with the cultural situations of the African community.

13. See F. D. Walker, *The Romance of the Black River* (London, 1931), p. 55.

14. See C. O. Oshun "The Aladura Movement and their impact on the Nigerian Society" in Emefie Ikenga Metuh (ed) 1986; *The Gods in Retreat: Continuity and Change in African Religions*, Enugu, Forth Dimension Publisher p. 201



It is meant to cooperate with the African culture so that African theology might be a successful phenomenon. Where the Bible is wrongly applied, it will lead to a cut throat competition between the Bible and the cultural setting of the African society. There should be a marriage of convenience between the Bible, and the culture of the African people. The word of God is not only meant for the western world, it is meant for all other races.

Therefore there is need to see the Bible in the light of African background. Where this is not possible, it then means that the Bible is meant only for the Western world and this is far from being the truth. Scholars should look for a way of situating the Bible in the light of the African setting. This is what the author has referred to as African Christianity.

To some people, whenever the issue of African Christianity is being raised they see it as a vision which is unchristian.<sup>15</sup> They have forgotten that even the religion of the Western world is seriously linked with the Western culture. The total eradication of the Nigerian Autochthonous religion and culture for the Christian faith looks very strange and it is even not Biblical because the Bible when written was taking the cultural influences of the Jews into consideration.<sup>16</sup>

It is to be noted that the type of Christianity or theology the Nigerian people practice is still alien despite the fact that they have gained their Independence for a long time. The colonial inspiration is still found in the Yoruba Christianity. It is the vision of removing the colonial factor

from Christianity and eventually derobing it of its western attire that brings the phenomenon of African Christianity into lime light.

In a nutshell this African Christianity can be explained as the African perspective of christianity. Here, Western Christianity can be allowed to be a catalyst, it should not be an instrument of political, economic or cultural domination. It could also be described as African Theology. This is the theology based on the Biblical faith of Africans, and it speaks to the African soul. It is expressed in categories of thought which arise out of the philosophy of the African people. This does not mean it is narrow in out look – i.e. syncretistic.

#### **Contextualisation of Christianity and the Modus Operandi**

It is to be noted that many articles have been written on contextualisation of Christianity in Nigeria. The author's appraisal in this section is the Modus Operandi of the contextualisation. The task of the author in this section is to argue for the relevance of Christianity to the Yoruba Christian society. This task is beyond the responsibility of the western christianity. However the author is here submitting that orthodox christianity could cooperate with the Aladura churches in making christianity relevant to the society. Divorcing our culture from Christianity would no longer help the contextualisation of Christianity in this age,

G. L. Lasebikan put it in this form:

The Church in Nigeria must come to face the realities of the moment. Our liturgies must spring

15. See E. O. Babalola, "Phenomenon of African Christianity vis-a-vis adoption of the Bible and Cultural Awareness in Nigeria", *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, op. cit p. 91.

16. Ibid. p. 91

from our cultic needs and must meet our spiritual temperament. The gospel must be preached in our native languages and must be made to lean on issues which our imaginations are capable of grasping. Then and only then can the Bible be relevant to our needs and christianity properly contextualised.<sup>17</sup>

In an attempt to contextualise Christianity, the world view of the traditional Yoruba society must be understood by orthodox christianity. Abstract faith will no longer help the people. The traditional causes of illnesses accepted by the indigenous churches cannot be thrown away with a wave of the hand. Healing is an important aspect of the Bible both in the Old and New Testament. The Aladura churches are doing a lot in this respect. This they are able to do successfully by making use of the world view of the people. The Aladura Churches understand the culture of the people and apply the christian religion to it thereby creating a meaningful harmony between the two. This is further amplified by G. L. Lasebikan:

The church must come to realise that she cannot continue to neglect the people's culture, but must endeavour to find a meaningful harmony between the religion and the culture.<sup>18</sup>

The foregoing concerns the marriage of convenience between Christianity and Yoruba autochthonous religion. Had it not been for the inter-

vention of the Aladura churches, Christianity would have been rooted out completely from the religious scene. The arrival of these churches are timely and their contributions to the survival of Christianity cannot be over emphasised.

At this juncture it is important to deal with the various ways by which the contextualisation of christianity could be made possible in the Yoruba community.

Firstly, we must understand the fact that salvation is a universal phenomenon as found in Galatians 3:28.

Secondly, apart from healing African Independent churches have successfully related the Bible to the cultural background of the Africans, Clapping, singing and drumming are part of the African culture and these are found in the Bible in Psalms 47 and 150: African Independent Churches are already practising these features and this a quicker way of contextualising christianity.

Thirdly, the phenomenon of death and after life is common to the Jews and the Yoruba indigenous society. The death and resurrection of Christ could be effectively preached so that this phenomenon could be properly contextualised.

### Summary and Concluding Remarks

The submission so far is a critical appraisal of the phenomenon of African Christianity. We have enumerated the contents of African Christianity and given a methodological analysis of

17. See G. L. Lasebikan, "The Bible: Its relevance to African Christian Expression" a paper presented in *West African Association of Theological Institutions Conference* August 5th-9th at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, p. 8.

18. Ibid.



how to put into practice this long debated phenomenon. An adage says "action speaks louder than voice". This adage becomes very apposite while discussing the phenomenon of African Christianity in Nigeria. We do not need theoretical analysis. Papers, seminars and books have been written on African Christianity. It has been observed that the role of African Independent Churches cannot be over estimated while discussing the contextualisation of christianity in Africa. The concept of contextualisation is the approach of making Christianity relevant to the cultural

background of the Nigerian community. Having examined the world views of the westerners and that of the Africans, it becomes necessary that Christianity should be derobed of its western garment before it is planted in the Nigerian soil. It is through this method of allowing the traditional Religion and culture to play its role that we can seriously experience contextualisation of Christianity in Nigeria. The African Independent Churches have done a lot in this respect by making use of the attributes and traits of the Autochtonous Religion of the Africans.

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ILE-IFI  
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## A New Journal of Eastern Christian Studies

In 1950, Rev. Dr. Maxim Hermaniuk CSsR, a member of the Yorkton Province of the Ukrainian Redemptorists, who eventually became Apostolic Exarch of Manitoba in 1951 and Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church of Canada in 1956, founded the trimestrial review *Logos: Periodicum Theologiae Trimestre*. This periodical appeared until 1983 under the responsibility of the Redemptorists. The contributions were predominantly written in Ukrainian.

The "new" *Logos* is the result of negotiations between the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies of St. Paul University, Ottawa, and the Yorkton Province of the Ukrainian Redemptorists. It is a joint venture. The subtitle, in English, French, and Ukrainian: *A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies - Revue des études de l'Orient chrétien Zurnal Svid'nohrystyians'kyx Studiy*, indicates that the periodical attempts to communicate with a wider audience. The aim of the journal is described in the editorial of the first new issue (vol. 34 [1993] nos. 1-2):

This journal will be a place of encounter between the Church of Kiev and her Sister Churches of the East, as well as a meeting place with the Christians of the West. The editors invite contributions on all aspects of Eastern theology, liturgy, spirituality, and canonical tradition, as well as explorations of the history and present situation of the Eastern Churches, both Orthodox and Catholic, in the broadest interpretation of the notion of Eastern Christianity. Especially welcome are those articles which explore the ecumenical ramifications of a given subject..."

After having been relieved from the responsibilities of Metropolitan of Winnipeg, the founder, Kyr Maxim, despite his advanced age (b. in 1911), returned to his "child" as Editor-in-Chief. He is assisted by two staff members of the Andrey Sheptytsky Institute, Andriy Chirovsky (managing editor) and Peter Galadza (associate editor). The editorial board comprises four outstanding Ukraino-Canadian theologians: Alexander Baran (University of Manitoba), Petro B. T. Bilaniuk and Myroslaw Tataryn (both of the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto) and Laurence Huculak OSBM (Sts. Peter and Paul Monastery, Mundare). The Editor-in-Chief has invited to cooperate in the International Advisory Board Professors J. Madey (John Adam Möhler Institute for Ecumenical Studies, Paderborn, Germany; visiting professor at Paurastya Vidyāpīṭham, Kottayam, and editorial consultant of *The Harp* SEERI, Kottayam, India), J. Pelikan (Yale University), R. Taft SJ (Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome), and Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia (Ecumenical Patriarchate; Spalding Lecturer at Oxford University).

The first issue of the review in its new form also contains the papers from the First Oxford Consultation of the Kievan Church Study Group (its members belong to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and affiliated Churches as well as to the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church) held in August 1992. These papers



and the other contributions assembled in this issue, which became a book of 344 pages, manifest a high standard of learning and serious study, combined with ecumenical openness towards the dialogue partner. As it is not possible to comment on each contribution, the topics dealt with are rendered here:

*Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* [Orthodox], *The Church of God: Our Shared Vision* *Andriy Chirovsky* [Greco-Catholic], *The Union of the Holy Churches of God: A Response to Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia*.

*Borys A. Gudziak* [Greco-Catholic], *How Did They Drift Apart? The Kievan Metropolitanate, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and The Genesis of the Union of Brest* *Oleh A. Krawchenko* [Orthodox], *Response to Borys A. Gudziak: How Did They Drift Apart?*

*Bishop Basil (Losten) of Stamford* [Greco-Catholic], *The Roman Primacy and the Church of Kiev*

*Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* [Orthodox], *Response to the Presentation by His Grace, Bishop Basil (Losten): "The Roman Primacy and the Church of Kiev"*

*Myroslaw Tataryn* [Greco-Catholic], *Papal Primacy, Local Primacy and Episcopal Collegiality*

*Archimandrite Ephrem (Lash)* [Orthodox], *Response to Fr. Myroslaw Tataryn: Papal Primacy, Local Primacy and Episcopal Collegiality*

*Bishop Vsevolod (Majdansky) of Scopelos* [Orthodox], *Does the Restoration of Communion between Constantinople and the Greco-Catholic Church of Kiev Require a Break of Communion with Rome?*

*Archimandrite Boniface (Luykx)* [Greco-Catholic], *Response to the Presentation by Bishop Vsevolod of Scopelos: "Does the Restoration of Communion between Constantinople and the Greco-Catholic Church of Kiev Require a Break of Communion with Rome?"*

*Francis G. Morrissey* OMI: *The Spirit of the New Eastern Code of Canons*

*Andrius Valevicius*, L. P. Karsavin on Dogma and Christian Roots of European Culture

*Peter Galadza*, *Canadian Ukrainian Worship: Towards a Framework for Analysis*

*Andriy Chirovsky*, *The Place of Patristic Studies in the Restoration of Ukrainian Theological Education*

*Oleh Krawchenko*, *Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue and the present crisis of inter-Church relations* [in Ukrainian, with English summary].

Added are documents, book reviews, a presentation of the contributors and some useful informations about the programmes and publications of the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (223 Main Street-Ottawa; Ontario, K1S 1C4-Canada). The yearly subscription of *Logos* in the United States of America US-\$ 25.00, in Canada CAN\$30.00 and beyond the United States and Canada US-\$35.00

We are looking forward to the forthcoming issues of this outstanding journal trusting that it will keep up its ecumenical spirit also in the future

J. Madey

## Book Reviews

*R. H. Lesser, You who Are Sent*, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1988, pp. 168.

Catechesis has become today an integral part of the Church's mission. "And indeed every pastoral activity has a catechetical dimension" (CT 49). Catechetical instruction, says Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, is "a means of evangelization that must not be neglected" (EN 44). Much has been written and said about this ministry of the Word, especially in wake of Vatican II. But, practically very little has been written about the full-time catechists, the unknown servants of the Word. Here is a book that is solely dedicated to the cause of these men and women who work hard to "form Christ" (Gal 4:19) in our people in the villages and missions. Perhaps this is the first of its kind to be published in India.

In the strict sense only those in the missions are catechists (CT 66). The book is primarily meant for them; but is equally useful for all those who in one way or other is interested in this apostolate of faith formation. And the author rightly strives home the idea that all baptized persons, priests, religious and laity alike, are catechists, are bound to catechize. Very often the work of the catechists is considered as "lowly and hidden" (CT 66). The present book pays a glowing tribute to them. It is not a dogmatic treatise nor a theological analysis of the subject; it is indeed a solid pastoral meditation on the subject by an eminent catechist and experienced pastor. This book contains the personal insights of the author on the topic. He very well understands the role of the catechist in the ministry of the Word. The word catechesis is derived from a Greek word, "katechein", which means to echo or to resound. The catechists are the instruments used by Christ to resound His Good News to people in new places throughout time.

The catechist is the main factor in catechesis. The General Catechetical Directory says: "The work of the catechist must be considered of greater importance than the selection of texts and other tools" (GCD 71; AG 17). Fr. Lesser reminds us constantly that the catechist is not a mere teacher but is one who brings people to God (p. 66, 104). The catechist must be placed above all catechisms and the teaching media. Those who are being catechized first read the Word of God in the book of the catechists' life of witness. Only a committed catechist can lead those being catechized to God. This small volume is all about the qualities that a full-time catechist should possess, to qualify himself as a good catechist (Parts II-V). As it comes out of the heart of an experienced scholar, it is full of practical lessons. In catechesis, the professional expertise of the catechist alone will not suffice. The catechist must strive "to dispose some to receive the Holy Spirit, leads others to communion with God, promotes



participation in the Liturgy, and gives Christian interpretation to a variety of human experiences". In this responsibility he has to be constantly supported by the Holy Spirit, the chief Catechist (p. 55,66,84,95,104, Part VI). This book keeps a very broad ecumenical outlook and an attitude of dialogue towards non-Christian religions based on the theological visions of Vatican II (p. 153-158). The Liturgy too is seen as a very good means of catechesis (p. 149-151).

This book will be a valuable help to those in charge of forming future catechists. Undoubtedly it would assist all those who make use of it to grow spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. The author's insistence on the "person method", a new approach instead of the "catechism book method" in catechesis is praiseworthy. In olden days anybody who could read and repeat a text could be a catechist; but today in this modern technological era only a well equipped person can successfully communicate the Word of God to those entrusted to his care. Fr. Lesser writes in a simple but eloquent style, very clear and precise using the apt words to convey the ideas which are very dear to his heart. A few typographical mistakes are found here and there in this edition (p. 34,92,105,111,116,117,149 etc.). I have no hesitation in recommending this book to all those who are in charge of the faith formation of the coming Christian generation in our country.

Dr. Xavier Kochuparampil

**Archimandrite Sophrony:** *Voir Dieu tel qu' Il est.* (= Perspective Orthodoxe, 5).

Translated from the Russian by Hieromonk Symeon. 2nd corrected edition. Geneva (Switzerland, 1 rue Beauregard): Labor et Fides, 1988, 198 pages, n.p.

This book is not a theological treatise, but a personal witness of spiritual life experience. The author, born in Moscow in 1896 became a monk on Mt. Athos in 1925, after having been an artist painter in his youth and later a student of theology at St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. During his 22 year stay on Mt. Athos he was a disciple of Staretz Siluan, one of the greatest spiritual figures of our century. After the latter's death, he lead the life of a hermit for some years and became eventually a spiritual father in several monasteries of the Holy Mountain. Circumstances of post-World War II time caused his leaving Mt. Athos. In order to remain faithful to his vocation, he founded the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Tolleshunt Knights, Maldon, Essex CM 9 BEZ, England, whose superior and inspirator, he is even now.

Archimandrite Sophrony is rightly called the successor of Staretz Siluan. The book under review will share the spiritual insights obtained in a long life to Christians in every situation of life. In the first chapter, the author speaks of the grace of "the memory of death" then he reveals the very source of the fear of God, repentance, inspiration, self denial, god-forsakenness, love going till self-hatred, the uncreated light (1. The way leading to vision, 2. The nature of the light, 3. Lived experiences), of the personal principle in the divine being and the human being, and, finally, of the prayer in which God-Truth is revealing himself. Every page invites the reader to meditative reading, to meditation. Whatever may be lacking, will be given by God.

A translation into Malayalam and / or English is warmly recommended.

J. Madey

*Le défi du fondamentalisme islamique* (= Collection Arabiyya / Cahiers de Civilisation Islamique II). Geneva (Switzerland, 1 rue Beauregard): Labor et Fides, 1988, n. p.

This publication is edited by the Faculte des Letters of the University of Geneva. It is an approach to face one of the challenges of our time, fundamental Islam, which has obtained a leading and powerful position particularly in present Iran. There are four studies in this book (112 pp.) attempting at making the reader aware of this challenge. They are authored by Carl-A Keller, Biancamaria Scaria Amoreati, Mikel de Epalza and Silvia Naef. Added is a documentation presenting translations from sources written originally in Arabic.

J. Madey

*M J. Lagrange, O.P. The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, translated from the French by members of the English Dominican Province under the guidance of his disciple Fr. Luke Walker, O P. and first published in 1938, when he died. Reprinted by TPI, Bangalore, in 1992; XXV 670 pp; paper back, price = ?

"Old is Gold." This saying is justified by the reprinting of a book written at the beginning of this century by Fr. M. J. Lagrange, O. P. He wrote the book in French in 1928. Theological Publications in India has reproduced it on the ground that it contains very useful and scientific insights about the meaning and message of the Gospels. It is true.

Fr. Lagrange, O. P., a great catholic biblical scholar and soul of the famous Biblical School of Jerusalem lived at a time when catholic biblical scholarship did not enjoy any such freedom as today regarding critical study of the Bible. He was fully convinced of some of the sound principles of biblical criticisms developed in the latter half of the 19th century among the protestant scholars. For instance, he was the first catholic scholar who favoured the Documentary Theory of Julius wellhausen and argued that it was in harmony with the doctrine of inspiration. For that however, he received a strong warning from Rome. Even then his writings contain genuine thoughts and insights which at present appear in the form of modern exegesis.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a master piece of M J Lagrange. It is a scientific and systematic study of the four Gospels in order to compose a life history of Jesus Christ. Lagrange here presents the life of Christ according to the spirit of the gospels. This book is therefore the result of deep meditation and scrupulous study of the four gospels.

The book has two parts. In the first part the author describes the birth and childhood of Jesus, the relationship of John the Baptist and Jesus the ministry in Galilee and the formation of the disciples. This covers 320 pages. The second part is a continuation of the first, which treats chiefly the preaching of Jesus outside galilee. The Holy week events are treated in detail and a thorough study is made on passion and resurrection of Jesus. At the end the author has added three epilogues regarding the person of Christ and the prologue of the gospel of John.



It may be said that to a great extent the modern Bible scholars only proclaim from housetops that which M. J. Lagrange whispered behind closed doors and we today hear in the light whatever he has said in the dark.

Fr. Joseph Kottackal

*J. N. M. Wijngaards, Backgrounds to the Gospels*, 8th impression (Bangalore: TPI 1993) Pp xii + 344.

This 8th impression-book by the well-known scholar J. N. M. Wijngaards is a general introduction to any gospel studies. The book is divided into 24 chapters and discusses the various aspects that concern the Bible. The first chapter deals with the etymology of the Gospel, the doctrine of inspiration, the different versions of the Gospel and the apocryphal gospels. The Gospels and the four evangelists together with an account of their specific purposes in the composition of the Gospels are dealt with in the following four chapters. This is followed by some general but very important information on the geography of Palestine, chronology and political climate of the time of Jesus.

The temple and the religious practices of the Jews have remained topics of paramount importance and interest for the Christians. The Jewish feasts and prayers were superseded and reinterpreted by Jesus and fulfilled in Jesus. Jewish religion has bloomed into Christianity. The temple where Jesus taught and which he was about his Father's business was an awe-inspiring and magnificent structure. One cannot but be struck by the lively re-presentation of the temple and the Jewish religious background depicted in the book.

Another fascinating topic of discussion is the articles used in the daily life of the Jews. Many of us are not quite familiar with the Jewish way of dressing, their meals, agricultural tools and other things. Jewish system of money and values, weights and measures and key and lamps are always subjects dear to all Christians. These are well explained in the book.

Jesus' character and personality, words and deeds, thoughts and behaviour have always remained the core of any investigation in the history of Christianity. The language he spoke, the parables he used, the miracles he worked were all manifestations of a power that was dynamic and effective. These at the same time disclosed the intimate and close relationship that existed between Jesus and the Father, between Jesus and the Spirit. Such is the content of the ensuing chapters.

The transmission of the words and deeds of Jesus in the form of the gospels and the accuracy of the gospel-accounts and the traditions underlying them have been discussed at length. The book comes to a close with a description of Jesus' passion and resurrection, mysteries that have formed the foundation of Christian life and religion.

The book is indeed a rich contribution towards any Biblical study and research. Its worth and popular support can never be over-estimated. The fact that the book has gone into the 8th impression speaks for itself. The

book is an indispensable tool for all students of the Bible, the catechists and their students, priests, religious and seminarians. It is valuable as a meditation book because the religious symbolisms and spiritual truths of Christianity are well explained. Again, it is sure to render excellent service to anyone, Christians as well as non-Christians, as a lucid interpretation of the Bible, theology, Christology and pneumatology. Except for a few printing mistakes, the book is a perfect guide to the Bible with all the artistic illustrations and thoughtful explanations. In a language that is terse and telling, lucid and clear the author tries to make the age of Christ and of the evangelists present reality geographically, chronologically and culturally, as the publishers have rightly claimed. It is a fitting 'Background to the Gospels.'

Fr Mathew Chandrankunnel

**Kochuparampil Xavier**, *Evangelization in India: A Theological Analysis of the Missionary Role of the Syro-Malabar Church in the Light of the Vatican II and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Vol. I: lix+173 p; Vol. II: 174-426P. Published by OIRSI, Vadavathoor, Kottayam - 686 010.

The Syro-Malabar Church, the offspring of the evangelisation of St Thomas the Apostle of India, is undergoing a crucial period in its life. Recently this church has been raised into status of a Major Archiepiscopal Church. This approval of the 'Sui Juris' status of this church poses a number of further problems. Every individual church has the right and duty to evangelise the whole world and render pastoral care to her children wherever they are. Without the freedom to undertake these basic duties the approval of the sui juris status is nothing at all.

This new book *Evangelisation in India* by Dr. Xavier Kochuparampil is a thorough study of the situation of the Syro-Malabar Church, which is unjustly called off her inherent right of evangelisation outside Kerala. This is a doctoral thesis submitted to the Catholic University of Leuven.

This book is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters delineate in general the church's understanding of her mission. Vat. II gave theological foundation to the missionary activity of the Church against the context of the new understanding of the mission of the Church, which is trinitarian in origin. Therefore it is nothing but the continuation of the mission of the Son and the mission of Holy Spirit. Before the Council the church used to speak of its mission. The council made a shift from missions to mission. Now the term used is evangelisation.

Chapter three examines the Indian situation: Multiplicity of religions and the situation of massive poverty. Similarly India presents a diversified picture in the ecclesiastical realm because of the existence of three individual churches, the Syro-Malabar Church from the Apostolic period, the Latin Church from 16th Century and the Syro-Malankara Church from 1930. Combining in herself the Past Syrian and Indian heritage, the Syro-Malabar Church continued to exist over the centuries in India. But unfortunately the right of the Syro-Malabar with all India jurisdiction was suppressed in the course of time and her missionary endeavours limited a part of the present state of Kerala.



The Chapter four analyses the question of jurisdiction and the pastoral care of the immigrants and evangelisation. Catholic church being the communion of churches, each individual sui juris church has a responsibility for evangelisation because evangelisation is something without which the church can not exist. Now the sons and daughters of the Syro-Malabar church are compelled to do the work of evangelisation for another individual church, i.e. the Latin Church. A church which comprised 24% of the catholic population of India and which supplies 70% of the missionary personal is compelled to confine itself to the small state of Kerala which only 47% in area. She is allowed to look after the immigrant of the city of Bombay only. The cities of Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore and Ahammadabad are even now forbidden areas for the Syro-Malabar Church.

The chapter five, it is argued that the Syro-Malabar Church should be restored to her bygone All India Jurisdictional rights. Only this can remedy the dichotomy in teaching and practise of the Church.

This book delves deep into the question whether the Thomas Christians were interested in evangelisation even prior to the arrival of the Portuguese. It has brought out clear evidence for the missionary enthusiasm of the community.

This is a well written thought provoking book which is dealing with a burning problems for the Syro-Malabar Church. This is surely a valuable contribution to the Apostolic Church in India which trying to formulate the theology of evangelisation of its own. Let us hope the study of this book will contribute much to the solution of the problems facing this church.

Fr. Chacko Puthiaparampil

*John Travis, In Defence of Faith: The Theology of Patriarch Nicephoros of Constantinople*, Hellenic College Press, Brookline (Mass), 1984, p. xvii+182, n. p.

This monograph systematically presents the theological thinking of St Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople (758-829). In the second phase of the iconoclastic controversy (815-843) Nicephorus played a vital role. His father, a high Byzantine officer suffered in the iconoclastic controversy for the defence of the images. In 787 Nicephorus took part in the Second Council of Nice, representing the emperor. Later he founded a monastery but was soon called back to Constantinople to become the Patriarch (806-815). In 815 he had to retire to his former monastery, but he continued his opposition to the iconoclastic Emperor Leo V.

Iconoclasm was a some what complex reality; several factors were involved in it. But from 815 to 843, the second phase of controversy, there were able men to defend the icons theologically. Among those who defended it, Nicephorus was a very prominent leader, although he had to suffer for that.

John Travis is here systematically presenting the entire theological world view of St. Nicephorus. John presents Nicephorus as a man of his age and as a witness to tradition. This book is a very good introduction to study deeply the works of St. Nicephorus, who is not well read and well appreciated in the modern times. "He has been little read; there are no reliable

translations of the edited texts, themselves sorely uncritical, into any modern European language" (Introduction, p. 2).

In order to know the early 9th c. Byzantine thought, St. Nicephorus is very necessary and Fr. Travis' work, "In Defence of Faith" is a good stepping stone to it.

Fr. Geevarghese Chediath

*Angela Heuser: Ikonenmalerei heute.* Recklinghausen: Verlag Aurel Bongers, 1988, 138 pages, cloth DM 58,00.

This book is authored by an icon painteress who is sharing her experience in this kind of Christian art with her readers and all those wishing to be initiated in it. Apart from the foreword of the Russian Orthodox bishop of Düsseldorf, West Germany, everything she has to say proves of a great didactic ability. Eastern Christian art is based on another understanding than western. While the latter's aim is rather to catecheticize and to raise devotion, the former's is to make the sacred and holy present. This is why icons are not venerated for their own sake, but become the object of worship because of the mystery or the holy persons they are making present in the worshipping community.

In a theoretical part, the author speaks of different kinds of icons, their forms, the symbolism of the colours etc. In the practical part, everything regarding the realization of an icon is described in detail. There are many drawings which contribute to making even difficult items transparent. As the author herself has given courses in icon painting, she could take into consideration all those questions raised by her students.

Particularly oriental christians, even if they do not belong to churches of Byzantine tradition, have the possibility, with the help of this work, of reviving ancient Christian art and thus of returning to their own roots, of course, with some modifications as e. g. the liturgical vestments of their own holy fathers and bishops.

We recommend this book to interested artists as well as to 'hobby painters'. Should courses in this sacred art not be offered in theological schools and institutes? This would certainly be an inspiring venture, especially in those parts of the world where Christian art has degenerated to some sort of "sugar coating" sentimentalism.

J. Madey

*Una Sancta. Zeitschrift für ökumenische Begegnung.* No. 1 of the 41st volume, Meitingen-Freising: Kyrios-Verlag, 1986, 88 pp., DM 8,00.

The main theme of this issue is "Oikoumene and Law". There are four contributions which we recommend to study: W. LIENEMANN, Ecumenical Church Law, H. HEINEMANN, Ecumenism in the new "Code of Canon Law" of the Roman Catholic Church, R. POTZ, *Communio non plena*, D. PAPANDREOU, Ecclesiastical Communion - from the Orthodox point of view, E. C. SUTTNER The [Latin] Patriarchate of Jerusalem: Canonical heritage in the controversy of the separated Churches. There are two more contributions on human and religious rights and some other papers in this review. We draw the readers who have a fair knowledge of German, however, to the articles quoted above, especially to those of Potz and Papandreou.

J. Madey



# News

## Pro-Oriente Regional Symposium in India

The Pro-Oriente which has its headquarters in Vienna organised a regional Symposium in India from 30th September to 5th October 1993. The venue was St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam. The Symposium was organised in collaboration with the various episcopal churches of Kerala, namely the Syro-Malabar Church, The Syro-Malankara Church, The Latin Church, The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, The Marthomite Church and the C. S. I. Church. There were around 160 delegates representing these churches. Among them there were bishops, priests, religious and laity.

The Symposium was conducted by a local organising committee chaired by His Grace Mar Joseph Powathil, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Changanacherry. Kottayam was an ideal venue because it is an ecumenical centre where several churches have their headquarters. The foreign delegates were headed by Mr. Alfred stirnemann, the vice-president and Secretary general of the Pro-Oriente.

The Symposium was formally inaugurated by His Beatitude Mar Baselios Paulose II Catholicos of the East on 30th September at 9.30 a. m. in Cardinal Tisserant Hall of the Seminary. Mr. Alfred Stiremann briefed the participants on the various ecumenical activities of Pro-Oriente. The inauguration was followed by the presentation of scholarly papers and the discussion. Christological consensus, communion of churches, Primacy and conciliarity etc. were some of the themes discussed in the symposium. The discussions were open, sincere and fruitful. Coming together of the Delegates of various churches and the sincere and serious discussions on the issues which keep them separated was itself a great success of the symposium. All the delegates participated in the prayer services conducted by different churches every morning before the presentations of the papers. The reception with dinner given every evening by different churches was another occasion for all to experience the unity and an occasion to break the barriers that separated various churches for a long time.

H. H. Moran Mar Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews II, the Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, was declared *protector* of the Pro-Oriente and the concered document was presented by Mr. Alfred Stirnemann. His Holiness attended the Symposium and the receptions and spoke on several occasions to the Delegates. The Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity was represented by Fr. Bernard Dubasque.

The Symposium was a great success and its credit goes to Mar Joseph Powathil, the representatives of the various churches and to the Pro-Oriente.

Mar Joseph Powathil is always in the forefront of the ecumenical movements in India. If the discussion are continued in the spirit of the symposium, the unity desired by Christ will not be far away.

### **Veritatis Splendor**

Pope John Paul II published an Encyclical letter "Veritatis Splendor" on October 5, 1993. It is signed on August 6, 1993. It was a long awaited encyclical on various serious issues in Christian morality. Conscience, sin, Freedom, Truth, criteria of morality etc. are some of the topics discussed in this letter. In moral thinking and action relativity becomes the prevailing opinion, subjectivism and individualism become dominant.

Church is a community of believers, a community that follows the right way. It is her duty to indicate which way is right, which way leads to salvation especially when many follow the wrong way thinking it to be the right one. Man today does not posit the question "ought I to do this?" instead he asks "can I do this"? Whatever is possible is right-this is the modern moral culture. Sacrifice self-control, self-denial, suffering etc. begin to loose their values. Man is after the consumer culture. He rules out the possibility of mortal sin. Human freedom becomes alienated from truth. Subjectivism and individualism become the criterion of moral action. It is in this context that the Pope considered it his duty to speak out clearly on various moral issues. The encyclical which is addressed directly to the bishops of the catholic church is the fruit of wide consultation which began years ago. Let us hope that it will bear fruit and serve as a valid guideline to the third millenium.

### **Chief Rabbi meets the Pope**

Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau met His Holiness Pope John Paul II in Castel Gandolf on 22nd September 1993. The historic meeting was very cordial and it paved way to both leaders to support the peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians and the peace in the middle East at large. In the meeting the Rabbi extended the Pope a cordial invitation to visit Jerusalem.

### **Patriarch Alexis II warns against civil war**

His Beatitude Alexis II, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox church requested Russians to love each other and to refrain from power struggles which will only lead to bloodshed. He requested them to follow the democratic path based on the constitution and urged them to compromise.

### **Hungarian Bishops warn their faithful**

As the election approached the Bishops of Hungary have asked their faithful to be responsible in the forthcoming elections. What disturbs a christian more is not to be the economic crisis than the moral degradation which is visible everywhere, especially in families and in education. This expresses itself in violence, pornography, crime, corruption etc. The faithful are requested to vote for a political leadership which could sufficiently guarantee the religious rights of Hungarian society.



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